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TURN TO p10

BACK TO THE FUTURE

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» Joe Satriani
» Weezer
» David Crosby

REVIEWED
Gretsch • PRS • Deimel
Manson • Blackstar
Alvarez and more...

MALCOLM YOUNG
We salute the AC/DC rhythm king's life & legacy

VINTAGE | DIY | REVIEWS | INTERVIEWS | TECHNIQUE

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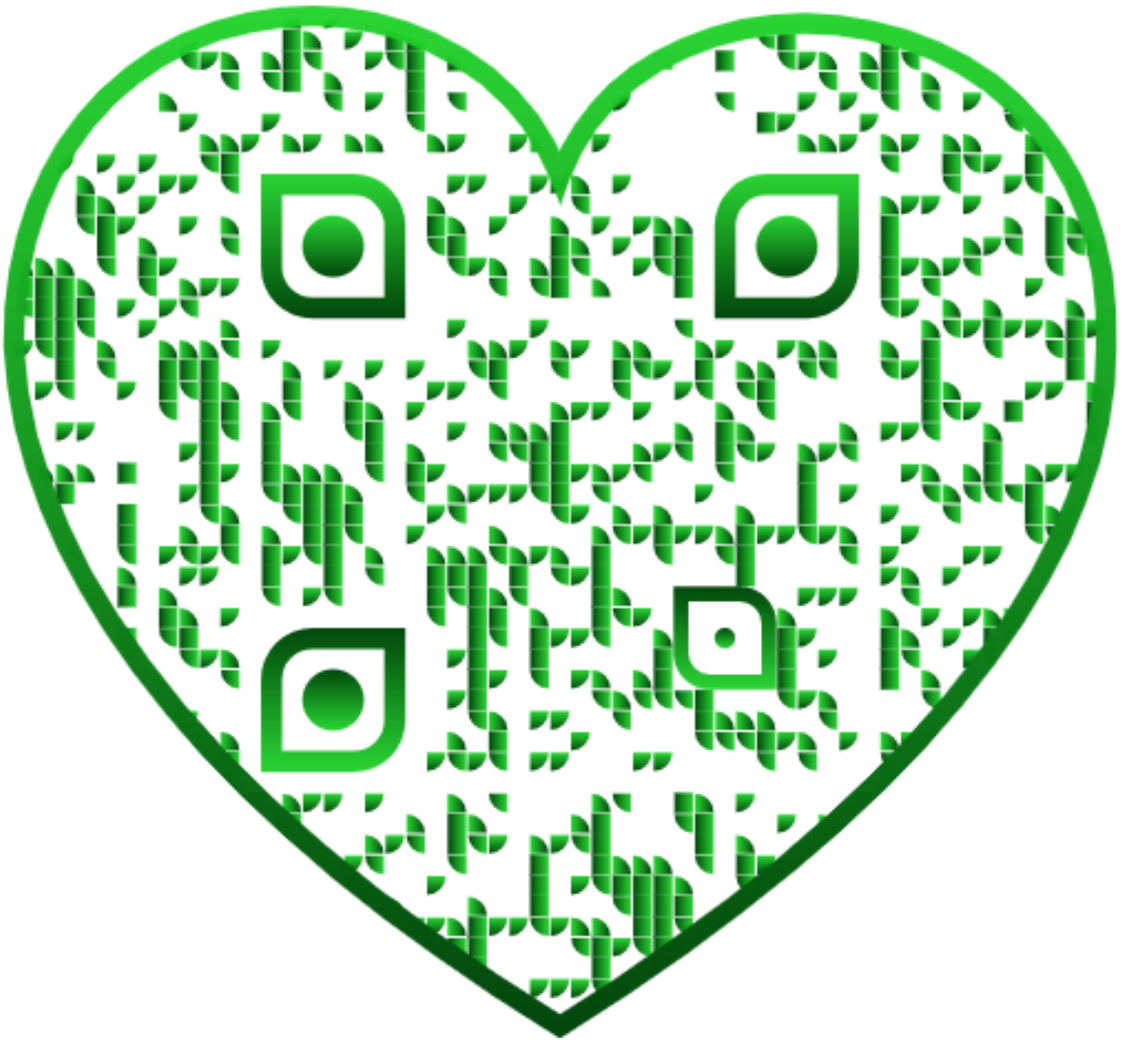

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Anthem Publishing
Suite 6 Piccadilly House, London Road,
Bath BA1 6PL
Tel **+44 (0) 1225 489984**
Email **theguitarmagazine@anthem-publishing.com**

www.theguitarmagazine.com

Editor **Chris Vinnicombe**
chris.vinnicombe@anthem-publishing.com
Art Editor **John Thackray**
john.thackray@anthem-publishing.com
Managing Editor **Josh Gardner**
josh.gardner@anthem-publishing.com
Senior Product Specialist **Huw Price**
huw.price@anthem-publishing.com
Digital Editor **Sam Roberts**
sam.roberts@anthem-publishing.com
Contributors **Rod Fogg, Dave Hunter, Gareth John, Richard Purvis, Teri Saccone, James Stephens, Michael Stephens**
Instrument & Cover Photography
Eleanor Jane
Managing Director **Simon Lewis**
simon.lewis@anthem-publishing.com

ADVERTISING
Business Development Manager **Di Marsh**
di.marsh@anthem-publishing.com
Senior Sales Executive **Joe Supple**
joe.supple@anthem-publishing.com
Ad Production **Craig Broadbridge**
craig.broadbridge@anthem-publishing.com

ANTHEM PUBLISHING
CEO **Jon Bickley**
jon.bickley@anthem-publishing.com
Creative Director **Jenny Cook**
jenny.cook@anthem-publishing.com
Marketing & Production Manager **Verity Travers**
verity.travers@anthem-publishing.com

PRINT & PRODUCTION
Print **William Gibbons & Sons Ltd**
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5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HU
Tel +44 (0) 203 787 9001

LICENSING
Regina Erak **07753 811622**
erak@globalworks.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTIONS & BACK ISSUES
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Tel **0844 322 1291*** (UK)
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Top Of The Class

In March 2017 we hosted our first Masterclass event, at which fretboard virtuoso Guthrie Govan amazed and amused onlookers with his skills and insights. A splendid time was had by all, so for 2018 we're going bigger.

Brought to you in association with Allianz, *The Guitar Magazine* Masterclass Series 2018 takes place at Dingwalls in Camden across three evenings in February and March and features three of the UK's most talented players in the capital city.

First up it's Bigsbys, Brylcreem and twang from Darrel Higham on Thursday 22 February, then acoustic pyrotechnics from Jon Gomm on Wednesday 7 March. Finally on Thursday 22 March it's the return of last year's all-conquering hero, Guthrie Govan. Get your tickets at **www.eventim.co.uk/masterclass** but don't delay – they are selling fast. We'll see you down the front.

Before all that excitement, there's the small matter of the NAMM Show in Anaheim in sunny California. We'll be there in force from the 25 to the 28 January reporting live from the biggest party in the guitar industry's calendar – make sure you follow us on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram to be the first to see and hear all the hottest new gear in action.

Here's to having a brilliant 2018, and may all your guitar-shaped dreams come true...

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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on p24

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer, working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and Nick Cave. His book, *Recording Guitar & Bass*, was published in 2002, leading into his career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps & pedals

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker

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VINTAGE BENCH TEST

Flying Club

Ted McCarty's modernist models were ahead of their time but second time around, they proved perfect for psychedelia, glam, metal and more. **HUW PRICE** test pilots a 1969 Flying V...

Above top **The '69 Flying V still sports its original tuners and serial number**

Above bottom left **The neck's soft shoulders remind us of Gibson's best 50s profiles**

Above right **The frets have seen plenty of wear, but they don't compromise the guitar's playability**

Opposite **This is the only guitar from Gibson's fifth batch of 60s Flying Vs to leave Kalamazoo with a black painted headstock**

These days, the Flying V is associated with rock and metal players including Andy Powell, Leslie West, KK Downing, Kirk Hammett and the Schenker brothers, but the model has done its fair share of pop too – notably in the hands of Dave Davies and Marc Bolan. It's also worth noting that three of SRV's favourite players used the V. Hendrix may have come to the model relatively late in his career, but Lonnie Mack and Albert King played them throughout theirs.

However, the Flying V of the late 1960s wasn't so much a reissue as a reimagining of the 1950s version. The pickguard changed shape, there were no pickup surrounds, and a Maestro vibrato anchored the strings rather than through-body ferrules. More significant was the change from korina to mahogany. In the process, the body shoulders were softened to improve upper fret access.

The Flying V of the late 1960s wasn't so much a reissue as a reimagining of the 1950s version

For the minutiae we are indebted to The 1967-1971 Gibson Flying V Website (1967-flyingv.weebly.com). From this extraordinary resource, we learn that Gibson made just 175 Vs between 1966 and 1970. Production was divided over five batches, each with distinguishing characteristics. Besides two 1966 prototypes, the first four batches were made in 1967 and only the fifth batch of guitars was built in 1969.

Above **One of the aesthetic changes made to the second generation V that differentiates it from the 50s original was the removal of the pickup surrounds, with Pattern Number humbuckers mounted on the larger pickguard**

On close examination, it quickly becomes clear that this Flying V is from the final production batch because it has the three-piece laminated mahogany neck and a serial number on the rear of the headstock to match. Having already established the rarity of late 60s Vs, there are two other factors that lift this to the top level of collectability. The first is the mundane but all-important fact that it has never been subjected to the common tuner and tailpiece modifications, and the second is the black lacquered headstock face.

The vendor is basing a theory on the black headstock. Apparently, this is the only known example from batch five that has a factory painted, black headstock face. This leads Mike Long from ATB Guitars to suggest, "This could be one of the very first, if not the first, batch five Vs to be made, as it does have other batch four features, such as multi-coloured wiring".

This could be one of the very first, if not the first, batch five Flying Vs to be made in 1969

Of the four finishes – Sunburst, Sparkling Burgundy, Cherry and Walnut – only 35 walnut Vs were made in the 1960s and this is one of them. Treble bleed capacitors were once installed across both volume pots, but they have now been removed. The bridge posts may have been relocated to improve intonation – something Gibson often got a bit wrong – but the filled

The Keeley Compressor

has gathered worldwide acclaim, and the Keeley Compressor Plus pedal continues the trend by incorporating player-requested features. The Blend control, which allows you to bring in some of your dry signal along with the compressed signal for the best of both worlds - dynamic and fatter at the same time. A much-requested Tone control allows you to fine-tune the tone appropriately for any guitar.

- Sweetwater.com Review

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pickguard holes under the thumbwheels are very hard to see.

Under the pickguard, a tiny patch 1mm deep has been removed from the body to provide clearance for the jack socket. This may have been done at the factory, or to clear space for a replacement. The white ground wire has been replaced but besides these non-originality issues, the only structural damage is a minor pickguard crack.

It has some of the soft-shouldered grace we've come to associate with the best of Gibson's 50s necks

In Use

We've previously suggested that a lightweight mahogany body with a set mahogany neck is a close as you can get to a sure thing for great guitar tone. This V only strengthens our conviction with its exceptional ringy and exuberant unplugged sound. It's also so sleek and light you might think it can indeed fly. Given the selling price and rarity, we decide against testing this out.

If you haven't tried a V from this era, the best description we can give is that it's not unlike a vintage style SG, but the weight distribution provides the V with far better balance. While it's not especially practical sitting down, it behaves impeccably on the strap. What's more, the proportions ensure your picking hand ends up in exactly the right position. So, while it may look unusual, it's actually supremely comfortable.

Opposite **By the late 1960s, nylon saddles were a familiar sight on Gibson's ABR-1 bridge**

Above top **The only notable bit of cosmetic damage is this small crack in the pickguard**

Above bottom left **The Maestro vibrato still has its arm, but its use doesn't do the Flying V's tuning stability any favours**

Above bottom right **Only 35 Flying Vs finished in Walnut were produced in the 1960s – this is one of them. The factory finish has an attractive checking pattern**

The guitar is in very good condition – even the original knobs are still in good nick, if clearly well-thumbed

KEY FEATURES

1969 Gibson Flying V

- **PRICE** £29,995
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody electric guitar. Made in the USA
- **BUILD** Mahogany body with set 3-piece mahogany neck, unbound rosewood fingerboard, pearl dot markers and 22 frets
- **HARDWARE** Gibson Deluxe tuners, ABR-1 bridge with retaining wire and nylon saddles, Maestro vibrato tailpiece
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Gibson Patent Number humbuckers
- **FINISH** Walnut nitrocellulose
- **SCALE LENGTH** 625mm/24.63"
- **NECK WIDTH** 39.97mm at nut, 0.97mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.5mm at first fret, 25.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.7mm at nut, 51.853mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.97kg/6.54lbs
- **CONTACT** ATB Guitars **www.atbguitars.com**

The neck's depth and fatness come as a surprise, but the V might feel flimsy without it. It also has some of the soft-shouldered grace that we've come to associate with the best of Gibson's 50s necks. We suspect it might play even better if the frets were a bit taller, but even so it verges on the effortless.

Comparing the V with a Les Paul Custom from the same year, they're worlds apart sonically despite having the same Patent Number humbuckers. Although the V doesn't have the Custom's sheer power, it's much brighter, clearer and more dynamic. It also cleans up particularly well, which makes the fact that someone once installed those treble bleed capacitors all the more baffling.

This Flying V is a fantastic all-round Gibson that delivers the goods across the board

The V's inherently bright and harmonically rich tone is able to make its presence felt through an amp. Combined with the Patent Number humbucker's characteristic upper mid resonance, it's a recipe for clean jangle and dirty bite. The V is closer to the fat-Strat tonality of a Firebird than an SG or Les Paul. In essence, this Flying V is a fantastic all-round Gibson that delivers the goods across the board regardless of amp settings.

A missing arm bolt precludes us from testing the Maestro, but pressing the mechanism by hand puts the guitar straight out of tune. So long as you can resist the temptation to use the vibrato, this V holds its tuning superbly. If you have pre-conceived ideas about Flying Vs, this may make you reconsider – or even convert you. As a player's instrument, its value extends well beyond its stage appeal and it's easy to understand why some guitarists who were lucky enough to get their hands on a Flying V 40 or so years ago have been playing them ever since.

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WIN

WIN! A ONE-OFF HAYNES ELECTRIC!

The pickups are House Of Tone Special P-90s with black metal covers

The James' Home Of Tone wiring harness has Jupiter Vintage Yellow Tone 0.02uF capacitors

Last month, we travelled to the workshop of UK luthier Guitar & Bass Build in Oxfordshire. Neil Haynes' company offers a wide array of services – from blanks and templates for budding builders to bespoke bodies and necks for DIY projects. But the jewels in the crown are the fully featured custom instruments that Neil and his team build under the banner of Haynes Guitars.

While we were there, we also set Neil a challenge – to create a one-off custom-build guitar design different to the usual instruments that he makes. Haynes rose to that challenge, and we're giving one lucky *The Guitar Magazine* reader the chance to win the resulting instrument!

The basic brief was simple. We wanted an instrument inspired by the classic non-reverse Firebird chassis, but for Neil and the team to put their unique spin on it.

At its core, the guitar sports a two-piece American swamp ash body with three-piece quarter-sawn 10-year master grade African sapele mahogany neck, plus a Santos rosewood fingerboard. The body is finished in a thin-coat polyurethane finish that's TV Yellow with an antique amber burst around the edges, blending into dark cherry red on the neck.

Things are equally high-end in the hardware stakes with Gotoh 381 tuners and a wrapover bridge, while the guitar's electrics call on the services of two of the UK's best after-market specialists. So, the wiring harness comes courtesy of James' Home Of Tone, complete with two Jupiter Vintage Yellow Tone 0.02uF capacitors. The pickups, meanwhile, are a pair of House Of Tone Special P-90s with black metal covers.

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STAR COLLECTION

Day In Day Out

For a quarter of a century, Feeder have endured as one of the UK's most consistent rock bands, outlasting many of their peers and still going strong with a new best-of and mini-album released at the end of 2017. **JOSH GARDNER** sits down with frontman Grant Nicholas and bassist Taka Hirose to talk through the instruments that have shaped their musical journey. Prepare for offsets...

Photography **Eleanor Jane**

It's been 21 years since Feeder released their first album, *Swim*, and over 25 since Newport friends Grant Nicholas and Jon Lee met Japanese bassist Taka Hirose in London, and set themselves on a path that would lead to top five hit singles, platinum-selling albums and major festival headline slots. "It's a long time isn't it? I never expected us to last this long!" jokes Taka. "Probably not!" adds Grant. "It seems like a long time. But from the start, Jon and myself were very driven, and we were into it for a career – we didn't want to just make one album and then disappear. We've always been more about the songs – that's always been our goal. To be a band where it doesn't really matter what people think at the time, it's about having songs that are timeless, and maybe 10, 20 years after they were recorded they still stand up. That was always the plan and we've stuck to that – and that's probably why we're still here, I suppose!"

Despite the highs, however, the pair have also had to deal with great tragedy. Lee's suicide in 2002 is the kind of devastating moment that many of us would struggle to get past, but Grant and Taka have been galvanised by their shared loss, "It being two of us has made us stronger, and feel more strongly about what we do," Taka affirms. "Grant is always the driving force. If he's not talking about a guitar, he's talking about a song – and that hasn't changed!"

Comfort In Sound

Talking guitar is what we're here for, and it's a subject that the pair both know very well indeed. Grant has a love affair with Jazzmasters that borders on the obsessive – and he came to Fender's quirky offset at a time when not a lot of people in the UK music scene were playing them.

"No there weren't really," Grant confirms. "I just liked the shape. I was playing Telecasters, I had an SG... but the Jazzmaster appealed to me because they weren't so popular then. My first Jazzmaster, I swapped it for like £200 and a Whammy pedal, and I just fell in love with the shape of it. I liked the fact that even though I'm not a big-framed person, I like guitars that have a little bit of weight to them, and also it being the longer scale. I love the Jag and the Mustangs, but the Jazzmaster just suited my playing more and suited my style. I mess

Grant's refinished '64 has been heavily modded like most of his Jazzmasters

around with them quite a bit – I change pickups and bridges and that stuff."

On the flipside, Taka's bass collection is a fascinating mix of classic designs, boutique curios from his homeland, and most interestingly of all, instruments that he's built himself under the brand ReBirth. It seems like an unusual thing for a rock star to do, but it makes sense when Taka shares the details of his pre-band career.

"After high school I worked at the ESP factory in the mountains for just over two years," he explains. "I've loved making stuff since I was a kid, and I love guitars and bass... it was good fun! But I was young – 18, 19... living in the mountains when you're that age it's like, 'How has my life ended up here?! I want to see the world!'"

Picture Perfect Youth

Grant's collection of guitars extends far beyond the instruments he's brought with him to share with us today, but they're the ones that mean the most to him, and there's no more special guitar to him than his 1966 Jazz, affectionately known as 'Old Brown'.

"Or Old Jesus as I call it!" Grant chuckles, in relation to the sticker between the pickups. "That's my first one – the one that I did the swap for. It's my most sentimental one – my '59 is the one that I use for recording, but this is the one that people know me for, because that's the one I've most used, and the one I used on the main stage of Reading back at the 90s.

"Old Brown is a '66, but it's a bit of Frankenstein, yet it's got a great vibe. It was worn when I bought it, but I've certainly added a fair bit of wear to it over the years – it's been thrown around a bit. It's got a really lovely neck, it's got a great sound and I really love the square inlays and the binding on the neck – that's my personal favourite era of Jazzmaster, with the big headstock. It's got a lot of character, it plays really well.

"The pickups I use live in all my Jazzmasters are Seymour Duncan Quarter Pounders, because they give me that really fat sound. I've used other pickups, but the Quarter Pounder for me just covers a lot of ground in Feeder – I had humbuckers in there for a while, I had a JB in the bridge for a while when I was using my amps in a different way, but now I'm mainly on single coils it's difficult to switch to a humbucker guitar when the amp is set a certain way. You can get away with it on certain things, but the Quarter Pounder in the Old Jesus is pretty much my signature sound. It's got a lot of tones in it, and I'd be absolutely *devastated* if it ever got nicked or anything – it's an old faithful. Everyone has that guitar, don't they? Most of the guitar players of my era had that one guitar that's the one, with Neil Young and his Les Paul, and that's my signature guitar."

"My first Jazzmaster, I swapped it for £200 and a Whammy pedal, and I just fell in love. I like guitars that have a little bit of weight to them"

Tinsel Town

Another of Grant's signature guitars is a 1964 model that's been finished in eye-catching silver sparkle finish. "It's another iconic guitar for me," he enthuses. "That's on a close par with Old Brown because I've had it almost as long. It was originally like a dirty white colour. It's a '64, but again that's got a Seymour Duncan Antiquity

Grant's first Jazzmaster – the '66 he calls 'Old Brown' – has been with him for over 20 years

in the front and a Quarter Pounder in the bridge. I think it had two humbuckers in it at one point. Then when I moved back to single-coils I swapped the bridge out but I kept the neck pickup, because it really has that really fat, really creamy sound that I need for some of the solos and guitar lines in Feeder, so it's just nice to have one that does that.

"For example, there's a song called *Turn* that has this really filthy guitar sound on the solo, so to compensate for that I hit the front pickup and it gives that fat, saturated sound. So yeah that one's called Wales, and I've had it for a long time – I actually had it refinished in that silver sparkle, and that's kind of become another trademark for us. I've actually got two matching '64s in silver sparkle, but this is the one with the most history.

"That one's got a Mastery Bridge in it – Old Brown has got a Staytrem. They're really good – I was just buying the Mustang bridge online from Fender or Allparts, but when I tried the Staytrem I was really impressed. It's probably my favourite bridge to use as a replacement. I've always changed my bridges to the Mustang-style unit, because it's better for live use, and also I tend to fix all my bridges so they don't really move. It's just better for tuning.

The Combat Firebird/ Jazzmaster hybrid was made for Grant by one of Taka's old guitar mates

"Staytrem do one that has a thicker post that's more of a fixed one... but I only found that out afterwards! So I wrap copper tape around the posts so it's really wedged in there. It's the sort of thing I've done since I started playing them in the early 90s. It's quite hard to find, you buy it in art shops.

"The '64 and the Old Brown were my two first Jazzmasters. It's been used on everything as well! It's a beautiful guitar to play, it's got a lovely feel. It's got a little bit more weight in the body than old brown, but it's an absolute corker guitar, it's got a beautiful neck. You know you get some Jazzmasters that just feel better than others – even if you buy a vintage one they don't always feel as good, but they all get better with a bit of wear, y'know, because it's been played. Any guitar just gets better wear I think."

Quick Fade

Grant clearly has a thing for sunburst Jazzmasters, but his late-80s Japan-made example has seen a bit more abuse than it might initially appear. "That's got a real history to it," Grant remembers. "God, we're going back a long time ago... I bought it in Japan, and it was cheap. It was a nice guitar to play, and I think I used that guitar at Reading at one of our big main stage appearances. If you look at any of the early Feeder footage, it used to have an oval Feeder sticker on the top of it.

"Basically what happened was that it's been completely trashed over the years! I took the neck off it, and put the neck on another Jazzmaster, I don't know why I did it, but it was just this body that's been living there for a while – this body with a broken scratchplate. I think I might have smashed it and thrown it against the wall a few times to make it look a bit more messed up for the *Renegades* video. But yeah, to cut a long story short, Taka started doing this thing called ReBirth Guitars, and that was one of his first experiments.

"So I gave him a body, some pickups and a scratchplate. And then for the neck... when Feeder headlined Download Festival it was a pretty big gig for us, but it was a tough gig, and I remember getting really frustrated. I don't know what came over me, but I basically trashed over two and a half grand's worth of Jazzmaster on stage. I don't know what happened to the body, but I was left with two bits and a neck, which had a big crack in the headstock, which you can still see. So Taka put some screws in it, glued it, aged the neck, and put it all together for me – so that's the story! It plays really well, and it looks really cool."

Trashing his lovely new Jazzmaster on stage did have an upside, however, and it can be found in the blue Jazzmaster he's brought along with him. "This is basically a standard US Jazzmaster," he explains. "Neil Whitcher at Fender and the guys... they heard about me trashing my Jazzmaster, and because I was endorsed by Fender, I thought I'd be in big trouble! But they came when we were supporting REM in Hyde Park, and turned up with that in the case and were like, 'This is yours, you can keep it'. And I was like, 'Oh my god how lucky am I?! I trash a guitar and they just give me another one – I don't deserve it!'"

"When Feeder headlined Download, I don't know what came over me, but I trashed over two and a half grand's worth of Jazzmaster on stage"

You're My Evergreen

While some of his Jazzmasters have more sentimental value, there's one guitar that is without question his favourite instrument, and one that is always his first call in the studio – his Sunburst '59.

"That's my holy grail – it's an all-original '59," he enthuses. "I got that after the success of *Comfort In Sound* – me and Taka went down to Vintage & Rare and he bought an old Jazz Bass. It was outrageous, I think I bought like three guitars in one go! The ridiculous thing is that it wasn't even that expensive – it was a bargain. It's got the original case and everything. It's just a beautiful guitar. I haven't changed the strings on it since *Generation Freakshow*, because I just love the sound of those dead strings. That's the guitar I use most for Feeder recording – even for the heavy stuff, it's on virtually everything.

"That guitar has got so much character. The trem is working on that one, in case I want to do any crazy rockabilly stuff. It needs a refret really, but I'm scared to mess with it because it sounds and plays so good. I've used it in videos, obviously, or if we did like, *Jools Holland* or something – but otherwise it just lives at home! Since *Comfort In Sound* that's been the most used guitar for all the Feeder stuff, and my solo stuff as well."

It's not all Jazzmasters in Grant's collection, however – he's got a variety of classic and esoteric instruments to call on, including his battered early 70s Sunburst Tele.

"That was one of the guitars that I got at the same time as the '59," he recalls. "I've always loved Teles. They're solid, they sound great and I love that beaten up Sunburst. I always loved Andy Summers, so when I saw that and I played it I thought, 'Well this is just brilliant'. When you see the right one that's the right weight and all that, you've just got to snap it up because they're getting hard to find these days. They just get better with age. Teles are just great guitars, solid, reliable – I love anything that's sunburst and has a bit of character – I've always been a bit of a sucker for it."

Just The Way I'm Feeling

Grant clearly likes his classic old Fender designs, and with that in mind, the presence of a Gibson Explorer might be surprising, but again it comes from Grant's affinity for playing things that are a little bit different...

"When I bought that guitar I was with Taka, we used to go to this guitar shop in Richmond quite a lot, and this guitar was just there for sale. And at the time no-one was really playing Explorers unless they were in a metal band, but I quite liked that, and it was a cherry one as well, so it didn't look quite as metal.

Grant's '59 is his "holy grail" and he's left the all-original guitar completely unmodded

This Jazzmaster was given to Grant by Fender after he trashed his guitar at Download

Grant bought this 70s Tele at the same time he bought his '59 Jazz

The 'TeleMaster' is one of Taka's ReBirth creations

Grant's Explorer used to be owned by Mick Ralphs and has been used on every Feeder record since *Polythene*

"It originally belonged to Mick Ralphs from Bad Company apparently. Well it had his name on the case, and that's what they told me! I haven't touched anything with it – the pickups are Seymour Duncan Antiquity humbuckers in there – they're my favourite humbuckers actually. It's been used since the *Polythene* period really – it's been used on practically every Feeder song since. It just plug it straight into a Marshall and track it, it just does that one thing – it just rocks."

Perhaps the most interesting Jazzmaster-style instrument in Grant's collection, however, is another of the fruits of Taka's ReBirth project –a full custom build that he calls the TeleMaster. "He's got a bit of a taste for it now!" Grant jokes. "He made this one for me that's basically a Tele-Jazz idea, similar to what the Custom Shop was doing with the Offset Tele, but I asked him if he could make me one that is more faithful to the Jazzmaster look.

"He's put the Mojo Pickups Gold Foil in there, but I haven't got my head around all the pickups yet. It suits my sound, because I love the Jazzmaster shape but that Tele sound is a really important one for me – so it's good to have something with a bit more character than just a standard Tele all the time. I am going to start using them more. He's done another one that's a sort of Firebird/Telecaster which is really nice – it's got a mini-humbucker on the front and a Telecaster pickup on the bridge, so I'm going to start using that as well. I think he's taken on board all the stuff that I've liked over the years!"

"Teles just get better with age. I love anything that's sunburst and has a bit of character – I've always been a bit of a sucker for it"

Space Age Hero

The final electric in Grant's collection is another esoteric instrument – a Firebird-meets-Jazzmaster hybrid made by Combat Guitars in Japan. "This was made for me by a friend of Taka's that used to work at Combat – they were a small company in Japan," Grant explains. "I wanted something that was a cross between a Firebird and a Jazzmaster, so I named it the Jazzbird, and it's kind of a one off. I wanted the Jazzmaster trem, the big headstock, the square inlays in the neck, and I wanted the body to be thicker than a standard Firebird because I wanted a bit more weight

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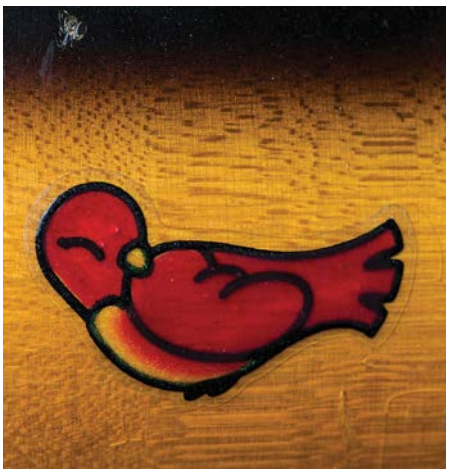


Grant bought his J-200 on tour in the US, and it's been a mainstay ever since

and a bit more balance as well. That's the problem with Firebirds, unless you move the strap button they tend to lean forwards – they look cool but they're not the most comfortable things to play.

"The original had two Tom Holmes humbuckers that sound fantastic, but I recently changed the bridge humbucker to a Seymour Duncan P-90, but in a humbucker casing. I haven't really had time to get to grips with it yet and I'm not sure it's the right one, but I do want to get it back out in time for the hits tour, because that's what I'm using on our singles album sleeve and in the *Come Back Around* video, so it feels wrong to not to use it for something!

"I think this was also one of the guitars where Taka got the idea for his ReBirth stuff from. He said to me, 'Do something different!' because I always basically say, 'Yeah, can you make me a Jazzmaster?' – because that's basically all I really want! But he was adamant that I should do something different. 'Oh okay, I like Firebirds... so can we make it maybe half Firebird, half Jazzmaster?' [laughs] I've had a few lovely custom guitars I've had made for me – I've got this beautiful ESP that's half SG, half Mustang, but I could only bring so many guitars with me today! It's a great guitar that, and it looks cool!"

Silent In Space

It's not all electric guitars in Grant's collection, however, and when it comes to acoustic, Grant has a few key instruments he uses for live work and songwriting.

"I write pretty much all of Feeder's stuff either with the '59 or with one of my acoustics," he confirms "That's what I've always chosen to write on. My Guild is an M-20, I've got two of them – I've got a '64 and a '65, that one is the 1965. I absolutely love those guitars, they're so good for fingerpicking. Again I hardly ever change the strings because I like that organic, dead sound for fingerpicking.

"If you ever find an old Guild M-20 for a great price, buy it immediately because they're great guitars and a good investment, but they're getting harder to find. When I got it, it blew away any other acoustic I'd tried. It was great for my solo stuff [Grant's 2014 *Yorktown Heights* album] because it's great for fingerpicking and rhythm stuff, too. It's also probably the best sounding recorded guitar I've got, even though it's got the smallest body. It's an amazing guitar, it's all mahogany so it's got a real dark tone to it – I'm not into sparkly sounds, I'm into organic, earthy, been playing it for 50 years and haven't changed the strings kinda vibe."

Grant's most famous and commonly seen acoustic is his old Gibson J-200, but it's an instrument that came to him by a stroke of luck and some trust in a dodgy hotel...

"As much as I love a small-bodied acoustic, I also love that Elvis/Johnny Cash thing that the J-200 has got, they just look rock 'n' roll"

"I was on tour in the US with Everclear and we did a gig in Idaho," Grant remembers. "We went to a vintage guitar shop and I saw it there, and I fell in love with it. I didn't have enough money at the time but it was really cheap... crazy cheap. It was like 500 dollars or something. And it had the original case with a handle that looked like somebody's belt, loads of stickers on it and the bottom falling out. It just had so much character to it.

I remember thinking, 'Oh I really want to get it but we're a bit tight for cash'.

"Then, about three gigs later, I think we were in Texas, I called them up and said 'Have you still got that J-200?' 'Yeah man!' 'Well then I've got to buy it!' I think I put it on my credit card, and I said, 'Well we're going to be arriving at this shitty hotel in a week's time – can you post it to me there?' And they're like, 'Sure man we'll send it through'. And I'm thinking, 'Christ is it ever going to turn up?' But then we got to the hotel and there's this massive cardboard box and it was there, and I've had it ever since. It's a great guitar – as much as I love a small-bodied guitar, I also love that Elvis/Johnny Cash thing that the J-200's got, they just look rock 'n' roll don't they?"

We Are The People

When it comes to discussing Taka's collection of bass guitars, there are three distinct categories that he favours – vintage classics, boutique one-offs and the guitars he's built himself. But the common theme running through all of them is a reverence and love for classic designs, and it's something that Taka learned when he was a teenager working at the ESP factory: "Some people there wanted to make things that were almost like furniture, very ornate," he recalls. "But for me I always ended up back with the classic Fender and Gibson stuff."

It's hard to improve on the classics, and that's exactly what Taka has in his 1968 Jazz Bass. "Before a gig one day I was in second-hand music shop, and tried this Jazz Bass," he tells us. "It was so nice and so good – but I didn't have time to buy it because I had to go back to the venue to do a soundcheck, and I never got it!

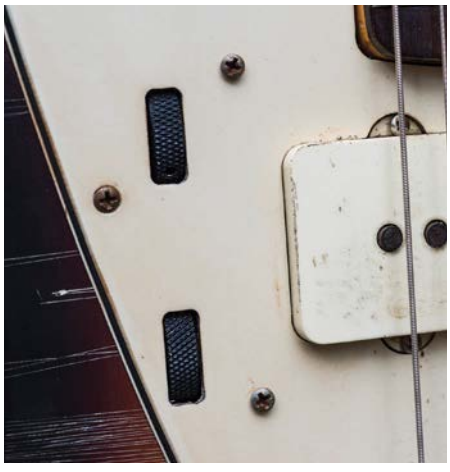
"So from then on I'm thinking, 'I wish I'd bought that'. Then when me and Grant went down to Denmark Street after *Comfort In Sound* was a success, I was determined that I was going to find a Jazz Bass! So I found this 1968 model that was in great condition. I love everything about it! It was the same day as Grant bought his '59 Jazzmaster – he wasn't sure about that it, because it was a bit old-school for him, but I was like, 'You've *got* to buy this – it's a '59!' [laughs] We got a discount because we bought them together!"

There's another classic-looking Jazz-style in Taka's armoury, but it's not quite as vintage as it looks...

"One of my mates was still working for ESP at the time and he emailed me, 'Taka I've just done a nice old Jazz Bass body and neck...'" he remembers. "I was like, 'Ooh that would be nice!' But I asked him to make me a Jazz with precision pickups, which is why it's got the big pickup cover on it – it's actually a Precision pickup on the front and a Jazz at the back. So that's my

Grant has a pair of Guild M-20s, and this '65 was his primary writing guitar for his solo album

This Jazzmaster is a hybrid build Taka put together from various broken guitars



This Ricky-style bass was made by one of Taka's old friends who now owns Kazu Guitar Village

Taka's original '68 Sunburst Fender Jazz Bass

ReBirth is the brand name that Taka has chosen for his homebrew instruments

Taka's famous Combat bass is modelled on an old Gretsch semi, but it's fully solid

One of Taka's ReBirth basses is this stripped down P-style

This ESP J-style bass has both Jazz and Precision pickups onboard

main recording bass. It was great, because as soon as I had it, it had that feel of a vintage instrument.

"That one has active pickups and it has kind of like a parametric EQ. I like to be able to tweak in the studio, so it's perfect for me, and very powerful as a recording tool."

Renegades

Two of Taka's most famous and familiar basses are a good deal more unique, and have also come to him through the friendships he made in his time at ESP, and the most famous one of all is his gold sparkle Combat bass, which he used at the height of Feeder's chart-troubling success.

"I've got loads of respect for Fender and Gibson, but sometimes I just wish they'd do something a bit different... so that's what I do. And it's fun!"

"Unfortunately the C on the headstock logo has gone, so now it's 'Ombat'" he chuckles. "Another friend of mine started to work for Combat, and I asked him to make a bass for me. I had a semi-acoustic Gretsch bass that I always loved, and I used it for videos a lot, but I can't use it live because it's fragile and has no bottom end.

"So I asked him to make me the same body, but solid! [laughs] It's an ash body, but yeah – it is quite big when it's a solidbody! The controls are the same as on the ESP bass – it has the same active circuitry. It's also got a Jack Nicholson sticker on there – I think when we were playing on *Top Of The Pops*, the director was like, 'Oh you have to hide your sticker, you can't show it.' I was like, 'Really!?' So I borrowed some tape and put the tape over his eyes... 'How about that?' And he was like, 'Yeah... that's actually okay.' So it's been there ever since!"

Another of Taka's customs is a Ricky-style bass made by Kazu Guitar Village. "Kaz is my guy who used to work for ESP, he made loads of basses for me when he was working there," he explains. "But then he left and set up his own workshop. When he was at ESP, I always used to ask him, 'Please make me a Rickenbacker-style with my spec!' And he was like, '...No.' Because he was working at ESP and he would get in trouble! So straight away when he started I was on to him and said – 'Now you can make it!'. And in fairness he was like, 'Okay... but only one though!'

"I love Rickenbacker's design, and it's got such a characterful sound, but it hasn't got that fat bottom end that I need for gigs. So that's why I put the Precision pickup and the humbucker in there – it's a bit more powerful. My favourite pickup is the Precision pickup – it's just great for rock, well, it's great for anything, but for Feeder the Precision pickup is perfect."

Piece By Piece

As you'd expect for a four-string stalwart, ReBirth isn't just about guitars, and the black relic'd P-bass style bass is his self-made weapon of choice. Clearly he's hit onto a cool recipe that smashes together classic designs with top-end parts and cool paint jobs – but we have to wonder how he got into building guitars again?

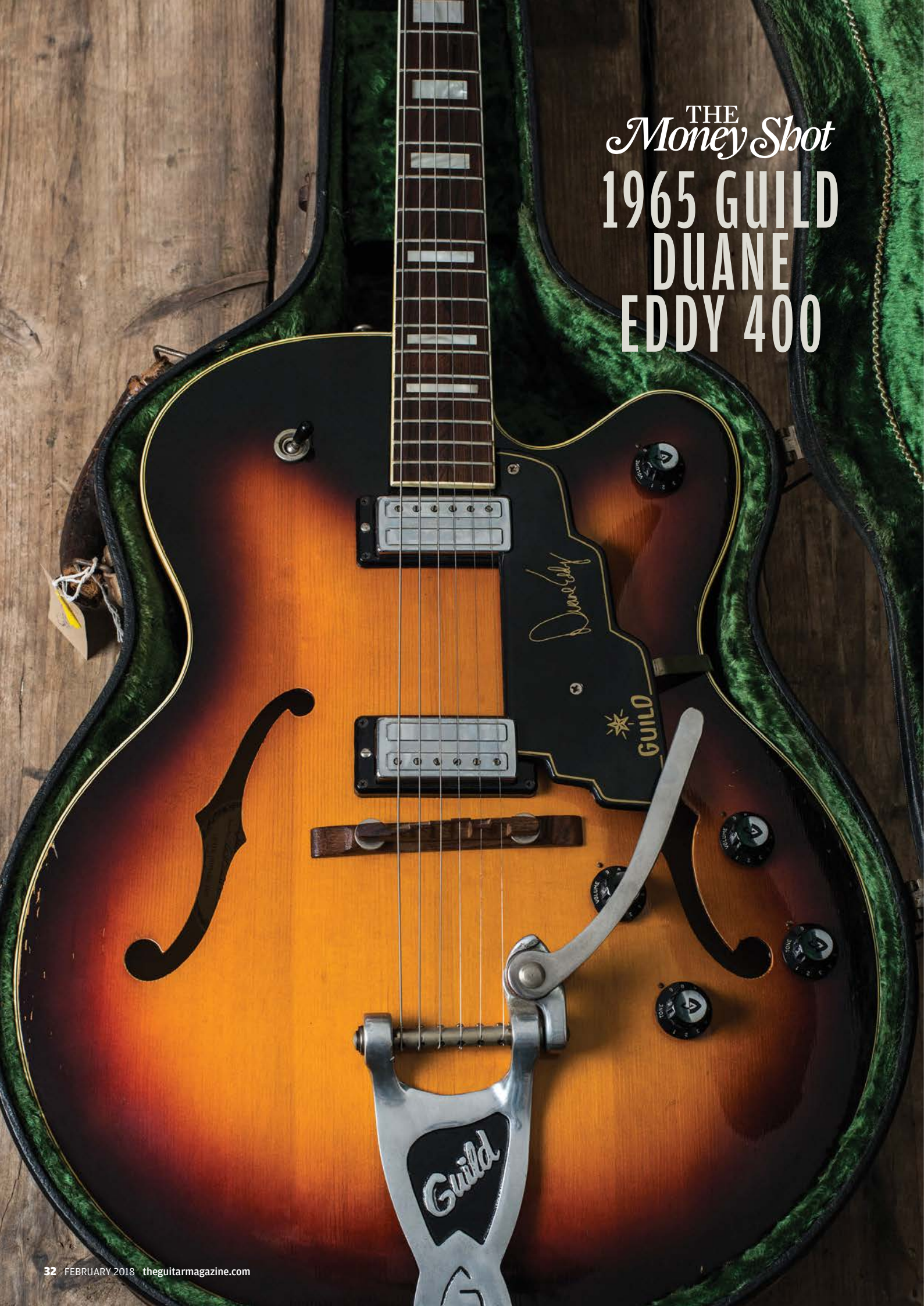
"Well, one by one my friends left ESP or the guitar business or whatever," he says, "And then Kaz, because he's independent, he can't give me a freebie any more! When he used to work for ESP it was all, 'Oh Taka I made this – take it!' But now he's independent he can't, so I thought that I should maybe just do it myself!

"I started out just customising because I didn't want to do too much. I found this company called Mojo Pickups, who are also in Yorkshire, and I was like, 'I'll support local business!' But when I did some more research I found out that Mojo Pickups are actually really interesting. I really love the looks and the sound as well – I've never actually met him but we've become good friends because I always buy pickups off him! He made some Thunderbird pickups, which I use on my '51 P-bass type.

"So at first I was just customising cheaper Fenders, Squiers and Epiphones I found on eBay, but then I was like, 'Hmm, these are actually quite expensive... maybe I should start to build myself!' So that's how it extended from customising to actually building. Now I've got my man cave – I used to do it in the kitchen but my girlfriend kicked me out! So I asked my neighbour, who's got this really nice brick shed that they're not using, if I could go in there, so now I do all my work in there!

"I've got loads of respect for Fender and Gibson, but sometimes I just wish they'd do something that's a bit different... so that's what I do. And it's quite fun as well!"

Feeder's combined hits/mini-album collection, *The Best of Feeder/Arrow* is out now on BMG



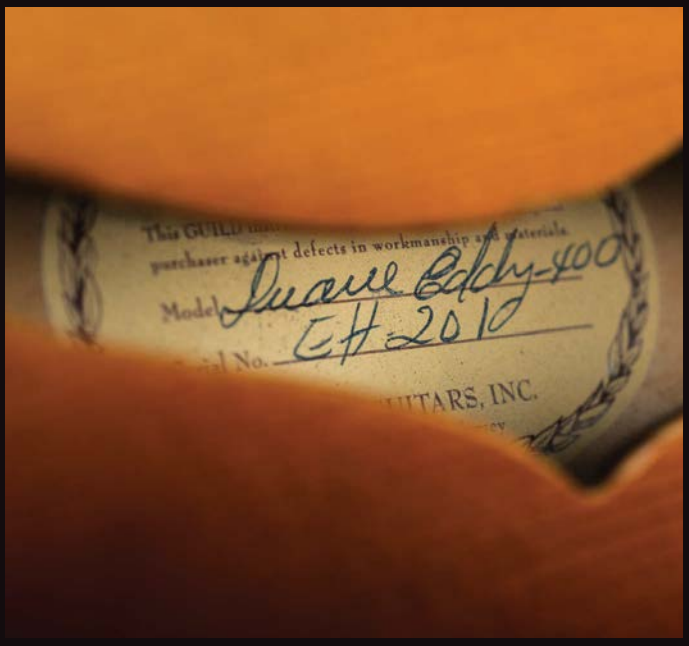
THE *Money Shot*

1965 GUILD DUANE EDDY 400

This hollow-bodied twangtastic beast was one of the highlights of the December 2017 Gardiner Houlgate Guitar Auction (www.guitar-auctions.co.uk) down the road in Corsham, Wiltshire.

The vintage Duane Eddy signature model ended up selling for a very reasonable £1,600 (plus fees) and we're sure its lucky new owner won't be disappointed with what they got for their money. All of the 1960s-period Guild hollowbodies we've encountered over the years have been superb guitars that punch in the same weight category as their bigger-name counterparts, but have a sound, feel and vibe all of their own.

Check out this guitar's woody and toneful original humbuckers in action alongside the '66 Fender Coronado that we featured last month at youtube.com/theguitarmagazine and be sure to stick 8 March in your diary, as that's when the next drool-worthy pile of vintage and used gear goes under the hammer. We've had a sneak preview and we're already excited at what's on offer!



DAVE HUNTER
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*

Letters from *America*

3RD POWER WOOLY COATS SPANKY MK II & ROOSEVELT DRIVE

Jamie Scott has earned a great reputation Stateside for the creativity and simplicity of his designs, and his 3rd Power amps and effects are a testament to this quality. **DAVE HUNTER** plugs in a pair...

The concept of the 'pedal-platform amp' has become its own thing these days: a simple, single-channel tube amp that, ideally, sounds great on its own for clean to edge-of-breakup tones, but truly excels as a foundation for any front-of-amp effects pedals you want to throw into it. The Wooly Coats Spanky Mk II combo by 3rd Power was designed on just such a premise, but company founder and designer Jamie Scott – one of the most inventive makers working today (literally) – is not one to confuse 'simple' with 'uninspired'. A boatload of design integrity has gone into this seemingly straightforward 1x12 combo, and even if you never show it a single stompbox, it's a potent boutique-quality Princeton Reverb-killer. Add the front-seat-friendly dimensions and feathery 31lbs carrying weight and, well, there are few more appealing ways to get the gig done.

Scott is one of the most inventive makers working today, but is not one to confuse 'simple' with 'uninspired'

But since it is intended to excel as a pedal platform, what better way to test such mettle than by injecting 3rd Power's new Roosevelt Drive into the equation? This overdrive is Scott's first commercial foray into effects pedal design and manufacture, but given his prolificacy I'd be extremely surprised if it wasn't soon surrounded by siblings. Rather than being yet another take on the popular Tube Screamer platform, the Roosevelt Drive takes its inspiration from a lesser-known Ibanez design of the 80s, the Mostortion, but like

KEY FEATURES

3rd Power Wooly Coats Spanky MkII

- **PRICE** £1,299 (ex shipping & duties)
- **CONTROLS** Volume, treble, middle, bass, reverb, HybridMASTER
- **OUTPUT** 15W
- **TUBES** 4x 12AX7 preamp tubes, 2x 6V6GT output tubes, 5AR4 rectifier
- **FEATURES** Footswitchable reverb (switch included), dual speaker outputs with switch for 4 and 8 ohms
- **SPEAKER** 12" Eminence George Alessandro Signature GA-SC64
- **DIMENSIONS** 50 x 41 x 24cm
- **WEIGHT** 31lbs
- **CONTACT** 3rdpoweramps.com

3rd Power Roosevelt Drive

- **PRICE** £150 (ex shipping & duties)
- **TYPE** Overdrive pedal
- **CONTROLS** Drive, level, bass, middle, treble
- **POWER** 9V DC PSU only
- **DIMENSIONS** 121 x 66 x 33mm

everything 3rd Power the premise is paid forward with high-quality construction and amp-quality components... more of which anon.

Before founding 3rd Power in 2010, Scott was a pioneer in the digital wireless market with Xwire and X2 Digital Wireless, having moved on to that from a management position with Sennheiser USA. But before that he was a professional guitarist, touring and recording with major-label acts Vain and Big Blue Heart, and developing a love of tube-amp circuits – and an appreciation for making them roadworthy – in the process. And while his bigger 3rd Power dual-voiced amp designs such as the Dual Citizen (Vox tones on one side, American on the other), British Dream Mk II (EF86 Vox/Plexi), and American Dream Sr ('62 Brownface/'65 Blackface) all draw on clear vintage inspirations, none is remotely in the realm of 'copy' or 'clone'. From preamp voicings, to his Dual Mode Spring Reverb, to output stage refinements, to Scott's patented HybridMASTER output control (only one of several design patents he holds), virtually every element of each 3rd Power amps has been thoroughly re-engineered to maximise the dual prongs of tone and performance.

Which brings us to the Spanky Mk II. A couple years ago, with all this innovation bubbling along Scott saw the virtue in applying it to a more traditional range of amps – an imprint, if you will – and the Wooly Coats line was born. I played the series debut, the original Spanky model, back in 2015 and found it a robust and appealing combo. With the Mk II, however, Scott has increased the amp's versatility enormously, without presenting a fussier package in the least. To other circuit refinements he has added tube-driven spring reverb, and his acclaimed HybridMASTER control (the Mk I was a non-master circuit), and the familiarly Blackface-style cabinet is now loaded with a 12-inch George Alessandro Signature GA-SC64 speaker by Eminence, which is one of my personal favourites among new speakers for American-voiced amps. Put it together and it nails the grab 'n' go platform square in the jaw, at what is a very good price for a hand-built amp of this quality.

Inside the folded-aluminium chassis, quality Mallory signal capacitors, F&T filter caps, carbon-film resistors (plus one crucially placed carbon-comp) tidily join forces on a thick, hand-wired turret board. Robust American-made Heyboer transformers do their job on the other side. The cab is 0.75-inch solid pine, handmade in the traditional Fender combo style, while the speaker grille is quality ply rather than the chipboard Fender went to in the blackface era. Circuit-wise, 'blackface-style preamp' is our most familiar touchstone, with a three-knob tone stage sandwiched between

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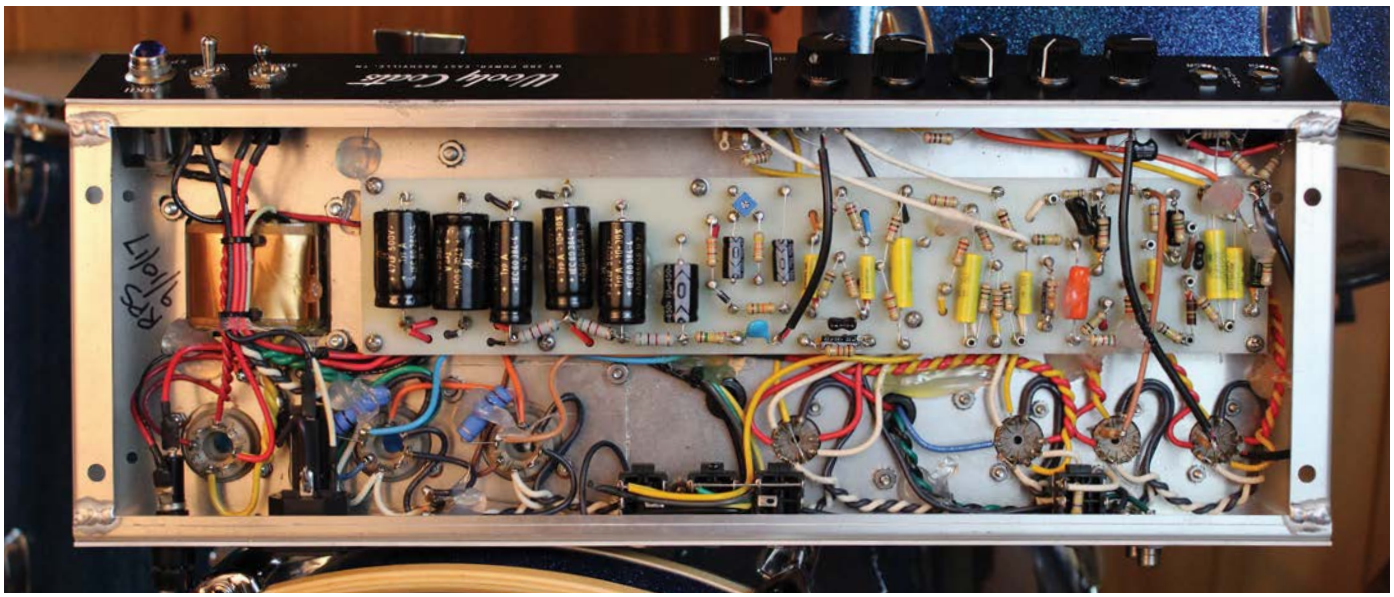

The Roosevelt Drive is modelled on an 80s Ibanez Mostortion, and is made to the same rigorous build standards as 3rd Power's amps

first and second gain stages provided by a 12AX7 preamp tube. The middle control offers more EQ-sculpting potential than Fender's smaller 6V6-based amps ever had, though, further increasing the versatility of this ostensibly simple package. And although comparisons to the Princeton Reverb are inevitable, the Spanky Mk II notably has a long-tailed-pair phase inverter for increased headroom and general signal robustness versus the dirtier cathodyne (aka split-load) inverter of that Fender combo. Reverb is, of course, tube-driven via a genuine long-spring pan.

All of which leads us back to the 'pedal platform' theory: while the above-noted design elements can all contribute to an amp that's bold and girthy in its own right, they also maximise its handling of any overdrive pedals injected into the front end, increasing the odds that your resultant tone will be balanced and dynamic, rather than splatty, farty or spiky.

The Roosevelt Drive pedal comes housed in a die-cast steel case that's roughly classic MXR-sized, with amp-like knobs for drive and level, and smaller knobs for bass, mid and treble. Inputs are top-mounted to save pedalboard space, and there's a 'soft-touch' stomp-switch for on/off (true bypass; note: there's no battery clip inside, so power comes from a standard nine-volt adaptor only, with center-negative connector). Its inspiration, the 80s Mostortion, used metal-oxide semiconductor field-effect transistors (MOSFET for short) for gain, and these components have long been associated with excellent clarity and dynamics in an overdrive, allowing the guitar's character to shine through rather than slathering the pedal's sonic imprint all over your playing.

In Use

I plug the Roosevelt Drive into the Spanky Mk II, and test the pairing with a Strat, a Les Paul, and a Novo Serus J with P-90s, and the design intentions ring true for both 3rd Power products. The Roosevelt Drive can be gutsy and hot, for sure, in the realm of low-to-medium gain overdrives, but remains textured and articulate throughout the range, with a powerful EQ section further boosting its applicability to your individual requirements. I particularly liked the way it thickened up the single coils pickups, without obliterating their character, and ultimately found it extremely playable and likeable – a quick route to outstanding crunch and lead tones alike.

Part of that, of course, is that it couples so well with the Spanky Mk II, but the amp also proved its merits by sounding superb with an Xotic EP Booster and BB Preamp, a Gas FX Drive Thru, and a JHS Angry Charlie in front. That thing about 'headroom' and overall design integrity really pays on this score, and they contribute to a tube amp that sounds and feels like it's working integrally with whatever solid-state pedal you goose it with, yielding an overall result that – ta-da! – comes out feeling totally tubey all over again.

All that being said, the Spanky Mk II is still one to look at even if you'd never contemplate connecting an overdrive pedal. In all this talk of 'pedal platform' I'd hate to lose sight of the fact that this is just a great little amp by any measure: its tonestack offers a lot of tweakability, the reverb is beautifully voiced, and the amp sounds extremely good driven to juicy breakup with volume advanced and HybridMASTER reined in – or cranked up full, if your venue allows. All in all, it's just a super cool and easy to carry amp that could excel for you on several fronts.

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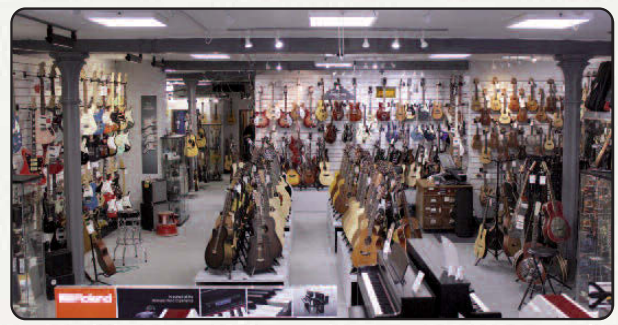

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TIME MACHINES

GIBSON TRINI LOPEZ

With its diamond soundholes, the Trini Lopez is one of Gibson's most recognisable semi-hollow designs. This original 60s example is in excellent condition for its age...

VITAL STATISTICS

1960s Gibson Trini Lopez

- **PRICE** £4,995
- **MANUFACTURER** Gibson. Made in USA
- **TYPE** Semi-hollow centre-block electric
- **REVERB SELLER** Nicks Guitars reverb.com/uk/shop/nicksguitars
- **LOCATION** Wetherby, Yorkshire
- **SEE MORE** reverb.com/item/7606938-gibson-trini-lopez-1960-s-cherry

While never one of the more mainstream models in the Gibson catalogue, the Trini Lopez signature guitar of the 1960s has gained extra notoriety in recent years. One of the key reasons is Foo Fighters mainman Dave Grohl's love for this instrument, which informed the design of his DG-335 signature model – a Pelham Blue-finished semi that borrows much of its identity from the Trini.

First appearing in 1964, Gibson actually produced two distinct Trini Lopez models – the Standard and the Deluxe. Both of these guitars followed a wave of other signature semis and hollowbodies from that period, which included the Tal Farlow, Johnny Smith, and Barney Kessel models.

With its pointed cutaways, the Trini Lopez Deluxe echoed the shape of the Barney Kessel signature, while the Trini Lopez Standard – the guitar we're dealing with here – was closer to a Gibson ES-335TD. Both Trinis were distinguished by the inclusion of diamond-shaped soundholes, split diamond inlays, a slanted Fender-esque headstock (that would also be used on non-reverse Firebird models), and a 'Trini Lopez' monikered tailpiece.

As a 1965 Gibson advert described: "The Gibson guitar that was inspired by Trini Lopez is as exciting as the young performer who helped create it... Again, skilled and patient Gibson craftsmanship has been coupled with inspired electronic engineering to create superbly sensitive instruments."

This Trini Lopez Standard comes from Nicks Guitars and is a classic example. While rare Pelham Blue Trinis are the most coveted, Cherry Red specimens are also well-regarded – especially when exhibiting attractively grained maple on the top of the body. This guitar does just that.

Everything on this example is original with the exception of the bridge, which appears to be have been replaced at some point. There are, as expected, some minor marks and dings on the body, as well as some checking in the finish. But there's nothing that would take this guitar out of the very good to excellent condition column, and certainly nothing that would de-motivate a potential buyer.

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Founders Keepers

GEORGE BLANDA JAZZMASTER

Fender's R&D guru George Blanda tells Chris Vinnicombe all about his contribution to the Custom Shop's 30th anniversary celebrations...

George Blanda has been responsible for decades of innovation at Fender. His Founders Design instrument is a reimagining of the Jazzmaster inspired by the Olympic White and tortoiseshell scratchplate combination of the early 60s, but with simplified controls, custom small-footprint pickups, an RSD bridge with brass saddles and a dyed and stabilised maple burl fretboard and pickguard. We caught up with George to find out more...

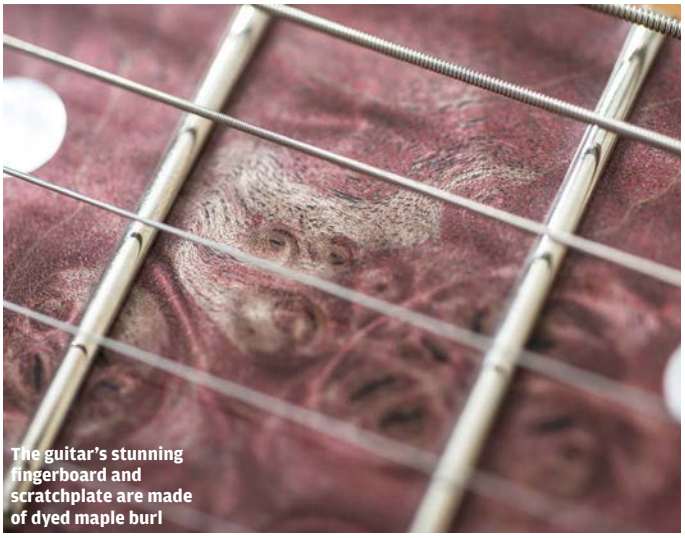
Q When did you first gravitate towards the Jazzmaster?

"The first song where I really understood what 'electric guitar' sounded like was *Walk, Don't Run by The Ventures*. I was about seven at the time. Of course, it was Bob Bogle playing a Jazzmaster. The instrument fell from favour during the overdriven blues-based rock era. In the early 80s I began to re-discover the early rockabilly guitar sounds and began playing a 50s Gretsch Country Club with DeArmond pickups as my main guitar. I began listening to a lot of surf instrumentals around this time also.

"When I started working at Fender, I came across a 1960 Jazzmaster that was laying around and began to see all the similarities in design to my Gretsch – body size, lower bridge

In his early days at Fender, George was struck by the similarities between Leo's original Jazzmaster and his Gretsch Country Club

The RSD Jazzmaster bridge has brass saddles and is much more stable than the vintage original


The guitar's stunning fingerboard and scratchplate are made of dyed maple burl

angle, very subtle tremolo unit and beefier pickups. It produced a very similar sound, as well. I realised that Leo really had been trying to make a credible solidbody jazz guitar, but he seemed to be aiming at Gretsch more than Gibson. I really fell in love with that sound."

Q Where did the idea for the dyed maple burl fingerboard and pickguard come from, and what are the challenges in working with that material?

"I originally wanted to use Bakelite or melamine in a maroon colour for both the fretboard and pickguard. Some of the original prototype Jazzmaster and Jazz Bass guitars used these types of fretboards so I felt there was a precedent, however slight. I wanted a marbled look like on old radios and such.

"I was having no luck finding the material and our director of wood sourcing knew of a supplier who could dye and stabilise large pieces of burl wood with acrylic. We got a sample and it was sold. The material works very well as far as machining and staying flat. The problem I had was the inconsistency in the wood, which is common in burl. The dye didn't penetrate evenly, so I had to be creative in matching pieces to finish the run."

Q Given that the physical shape of the coil has a lot to do with how a pickup sounds, how were you able to nail those classic Jazzmaster tones using a pickup with a smaller footprint?

"I've seen several different eras of Jazzmaster pickups and many of them were only wound part-way. It seemed like I could pull in the footprint a bit. Just rounding the ends removed much of the objectionable bulk; the wire doesn't build out in a square shape like the original bobbins.

"I also decided to spread the fibres apart very slightly to further reduce the build. It seemed like this would yield something at least similar. After spending more time with these pickups, they really don't exactly match the Jazzmaster, but they are much beefier than a typical Strat or Tele and have a very nice character that's similar to the original."

Q What have been the highlights of your career at Fender to date?

"Although I was hired to start the Fender Custom Shop, I spent most of my time at Fender in R&D. Many times, these areas overlapped. Design wise, I developed the two-point tremolo for the original American Standard Strat that, in various forms, is still the main unit used across the company today. Later I developed Fender's locking tremolo and designed many of the individual parts on our various humbucker, DeArmond and Noiseless pickups.

"I worked with Gene Parsons on the Fender version of the Parsons/Green B-Bender. I designed the Toronado, which was a spin-off of a NAMM Show guitar I did. In general, I did a lot of work to make sure all the parts fit together throughout the Fender line.

"As far as artists, early on I worked with Dan Smith to develop and build the first four Eric Clapton Signature models, which Eric played for almost two years before Fender introduced them. I worked on some early Jeff Beck prototypes and did the James Burton and Yngwie Malmsteen models. I worked with Louis Salgado and Chris Fleming to design, engineer and develop tooling to make the first US-made Custom Shop Gretsch models.

"I also developed the specs on the early tribute models; the Muddy Waters, the Hendrix Woodstock, and the SRV Number One. It was a special thrill to actually hold these iconic instruments in my hands."

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Why I *Love My...*

EPIPHONE CONSTELLATION

THE WHITE BUFFALO

Hirsute, gravel-voiced singer-songwriter Jake Smith on his relationship with a battered bass amp that's got a bit of old time religion about it...

1 I love my...
"It's a mid-60s Epiphone Constellation bass amplifier. I'm unclear about the specific date of this amp as it has no documentation or serial numbers with it. I've researched it a bit, but I've found very little information."

2 How I got it...
"It was gifted to me by my old friend and bass player, Tommy Andrews. He got it out of a church in Colorado where it was allegedly used to preach the word of God for many years. Needless to say, this amp has been saved both physically and spiritually a number of times..."

3 It's special because...
"Well, aesthetically this amp looks like a relic. It's seriously primitive looking on all fronts. Both the head and cabinet have no wrap on them. It's bare wood aged to imperfect perfection! It fits our ethos as a band – no frills, no bullshit. Just honest music, played with passion with simple instruments, through simple amps."

4 It's perfect for...
"This amp is perfect for playing live. For my technical skill set, it only has a few knobs, making it easy to dial in. It creates a warm tone and a fairly true acoustic sound."

5 It sounds best with...
"I've mostly gone direct into it using my Taylor 710e and 810e. These are both dreadnoughts. Coupled with this amp, it really brings out all the low end, yet still retaining a dynamic range. I've experimented with a plush, creamy overdrive pedal at times to give it a little dirt and grit when needed."

6 Hear it on...
"I've never used it for recording, but I use it live for shows on the West Coast. I primarily use it for on-stage volume. That being said if the room permits, we do use it front of house. Being essentially an acoustic power trio, it helps the guitar cut through the mix."

The White Buffalo's new album, *Darkest Darks, Lightest Lights*, is out now on Earache

Ones TO *Watch*

CHARLOTTE CARPENTER

Having spent six years melding incisive bluesy guitar with raw, honest songwriting, Charlotte Carpenter is ready to take things widescreen...

Over the course of four EPs to date, Charlotte Carpenter has demonstrated a broad approach to her craft. From the outset she's shown a knack for forceful bluesy riffs, but with her latest EP, *Shelter*, this has been augmented with a widescreen approach that brings in atmospheric tremolo leads and increasingly deep orchestration.

With that in mind, it's interesting to hear that the start of her journey was a little more, ahem, complicated... "I first picked up a guitar when I was 14 after seeing an Avril Lavigne concert – shame!" she exclaims. "For Christmas my dad bought me a black Strat copy with a little amp. I adored that Christmas."

With Avril as the start point, soon Charlotte was diving into the likes of Sheryl Crow and Alanis Morrisette, an education that no doubt informed her ability to write accessible but honest and authentic songs of her own.

"I've never written any differently, so it comes naturally to me – direct and raw," she explains. "I was always encouraged to express myself and I'm beginning to realise and find how much that has influenced my songwriting."

Direct and raw could also sum the powerful and edgy guitar lines that are the bedrock of Charlotte's music. "I was a songwriter before a guitar player so the guitar lines are there for emotional support, rather than anything technical," she adds. "I like to keep things simple and on message, and a lot of my songwriting stems from a feeling of anxiety, or an uncontrollable need to say something, so it makes sense to me that my guitar lines should embody those feelings, too."

The chugging groove of the new EP's title track embodies this symbiosis of guitar and emotion, but its film-score strings point towards a growing confidence in her vision. "I wanted *Shelter* to embody the personal journey I was going through as I was growing more confident as a woman and a musician," Carpenter affirms. "I knew I was about to make the biggest statement I have yet, musically and personally, so going bold and big seemed to be the most organic thing we could have done."

Her companion in all this is her blonde Telecaster, "I'm a Springsteen fan and in the studio where I record there was one similar to his," Charlotte explains. "I started recording with it and fell in love, so had a replica made. It's incredibly versatile, I can make any sound come from it and it still sounds like me. It's *that* guitar I've always wanted, and I'll treasure it for the rest of my days."

Charlotte's determined to push on and gain the recognition her talent deserves, but she knows it won't be easy. "It's hard out there for a woman across the board, you're undermined a lot," she admits, "But I've found the more you stick to your guns, put the practice in and stay determined – it gets easier. So many great women are playing guitar, and if anything I think the guys shouldn't get lazy, because we're only getting better. The dream is, someday, there won't be any gender conversations, and people will say, 'She's a great guitarist' and not, 'She's a great female guitarist'."

The *Shelter* EP is out now on Charlotte's own Let It Go Records

Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: getting out of the house for a change, unconventional bridges and loud Fenders...

LETTER OF THE MONTH

335 Alive

Hello guys, your recent cover feature 'Revive Your 335' (November 2017) inspired me to take the plunge and fit a Bigsby to my own semi-hollow guitar. The guitar in question is a Hudson 335-style guitar that you'd reviewed several years ago. The review was very good, except the pickups, but you reckoned it was a solid platform for modding. I'd replaced the pickups a few years ago with a set of Iron Gear Blues Engines, again based on reviews your reviews, and noticed a massive improvement in the tone.

It seems like one of the things that stops people modding is the fear of devaluing the guitar in question – it wasn't a big issue with a Hudson, I guess, but still was a concern for me! So, Bigsby on, the only thing left was to cover the holes vacated by the stoptail. After considering a number of options, I settled on two one-cent coins – I think they look cool and definitely add value to the instrument... well about two cents worth!

Keep up the good work, I look forward to seeing you do more of this sort of thing in the future!

Matt, *via email*

***TGM** Thanks for sharing your modding story Matt, we're delighted to hear that you got something out of our Revive Your 335 feature and were able to put it into practice, and your Hudson looks great with the Bigsby installed (see picture, right) – happy wobbling! Have you followed any of our maintenance or modding feature advice on your guitars? Send them in to theguitarmagazine@anthem-publishing.com and you too might find your guitar gracing our Fretbuzz page!*

Matt modded his Hudson after reading our 335 feature

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Bacon Bits

Dear *TGM*, I was interesting to read Tony Bacon's column 'Begin Again' (December 2017) where he quoted Shunyru Suzuki "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few".

This very much chimes with views I have formed over many years of playing and listening to music, during which time I have found that often some of the most interesting and exciting music is made by people pushing against their limitations – whether that's in the form of their ability or equipment. It's not uncommon for a band's first recordings to be more original and interesting than the ones they produce later, when they are more adept at playing their instruments and have 'better' equipment.

When we start out we don't know what we are not supposed to, or able to do, and that stops us from sounding like everyone else. That doesn't mean we shouldn't strive to improve our playing or equipment – those things open up possibilities, but never forget the importance of the imagination and ideas.

The great Tom Petty used to tell the story of his first meeting with Mike Campbell, and being less than hopeful when he saw the cheap, poor quality guitar that the guitarist held. Then Mike started playing... and the rest is history!

Michael Pullan, via email

***TGM** We're glad Tony's column struck a chord, ahem, with you, Michael. There's a lot to be said for the freedom that comes from being unburdened by the baggage of too much knowledge. That being said, there's always a balance to be struck – having great technique or having great gear at you disposal can enable you to fully realise that elusive 'sound in your head' in a way that you can't when you're just starting out. The trick is to not let all that limit your creativity and desire to try new things – a lesson we can all benefit from remembering!*

Strat's The Way To Do It

Hi all, I was reading your Strat Tone issue (October 2017) and in Chris's welcome he asked if we had any killer tips to enhance your S-type, and I was reminded of something I saw in a German guitar magazine to improve the tonal options you have on tap without any spare parts or complicated maintenance required – screwdriver only!

First up, you remove your Strat's scratchplate, then unscrew the middle and bridge pickups – don't cut any wires! Next, you simply swap the middle and bridge pickups around, rescrew them, reassemble the guitar, and you're done!

This enables five new options on your selector switch – neck only, neck and bridge (!), bridge only, middle and bridge, and middle only. As if that wasn't enough, this will now also give you a tone control on your bridge pickup – and all without having to do any soldering!

Erik Andal Hofsten, Norway

***Huw Price says** An interesting idea, Erik – this should work as you say, but you'll have to get your head around the fact that the middle position becomes your bridge setting and your bridge position activates the middle. A similar result could be achieved with a push/pull pot to swap the middle and bridge pickup connections to the switch. Then you'd have both regular and modified options all in one, without the confusing layout!*

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New Music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven new releases

Tommy Emmanuel
ACCOMPLICE ONE

ON The Guitar Magazine OFFICE STEREO

The otherworldly ability of Aussie maestro Tommy Emmanuel hardly needs to be stated – he's one of the finest acoustic players on the planet – but with more than 30 albums under his belt, it would be a fair question to ask what the Certified Guitar Player has to offer that's little bit different. The answer, says Tommy, is *Accomplice One* – an album that mixes original numbers and reworked covers, each one a duet with an all-star guest (or guests), many of whom are certainly outside the realms of Emmanuel's usual co-conspirators.

Things get off to a suitably encouraging start courtesy of Doc Watson cover, *Deep River Blues*, where Tommy trades verses with Grammy-winning singer-songwriter Jason Isbell. Isbell's southern drawl is a great foil for Emmanuel's voice, while the interweaving acoustic blues lines the pair accompany themselves with are finger-twisting but tasteful, not diminishing the simplicity of the original.

If you're looking for restraint, you won't find it on *Wheelin' & Dealin'* – a breakneck tour de force of country shred that sees Tommy's acoustic go toe-to-toe with JD Simo's sizzling electric guitar and bluegrass supremo Charlie Cushman's banjo in a freewheeling instrumental romp. The only question is how the trio didn't start a fire with all that fingerboard burning...

Simo makes a return as a vocalist on *(Sittin' On) The Dock Of The Bay*, and while it's a groovy number with some nice scratchy acoustic slide work from Simo for Tommy to weave his runs around, it's a little pedestrian and bland – something you always risk when covering such a classic hit.

He's on much surer footing when dealing with less well known songs and originals, and one that certainly fits the bill is his duet with Mark Knopfler, *You Don't Want To Get You One Of Those*. The track was written by Knopfler and has only previously been played live by Emmanuel – the wry, whimsical nature of the blues duet suits both artists very well.

Tommy Emmanuel couldn't make a record that *doesn't* contain some truly superlative acoustic guitar playing, and if that's what you're after you certainly won't be disappointed here. But the broad cast of interesting musical foils that have joined him this time around adds something new to the familiar recipe – it's not always a resounding success, but it's intriguing nonetheless. **JG**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE: *Chet Atkins, Martin Taylor*

Beth Hart & Joe Bonamassa
BLACK COFFEE

Four years since JoBo's last collaboration with LA singer-songwriter Hart produced the Grammy-nominated *Seesaw*, the pair have returned for another slice of hard-rockin' Stax-influenced covers. Recorded in a five-day sprint with Joe's svengali Kevin Shirley at the helm, *Black Coffee*'s intent is clear from the scuzzy, wah-soaked riff of opener, *Give It Everything You've Got*. Throughout Joe weaves his way expertly around the 70s horn stings, letting Hart's smoky but powerful vocal build the song to its crescendo. *Black Coffee* isn't just about hard-charging riffs and incendiary solos, however – you can get that from any JoBo release. With Hart's vocals as his constant foil, it gives Joe a chance to explore his softer side, as heard on the likes of *Damn Your Eyes* and the tremolo-soaked *Lullaby Of Leaves*. Bonamassa's output is frankly extraordinary, and it speaks to his abilities that with each different hat he wears, he's able to emphasise complimentary aspects of his playing, but here he demonstrates that Hart is perhaps his most musically appealing foil. **GJ**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE: *Joe Bonamassa, Joanne Shaw Taylor*

First Aid Kit
RUINS

Ruins is the fourth LP from First Aid Kit, and fittingly comes four years after the critically acclaimed *Stay Gold*. It opens with a melancholic nostalgia, following a break-up for Klara Soderberg, instantly delving in to their trademark Everly-esque harmonies, before lilting into roots territory with pedal-steel from Melvin Duffy. *Fireworks* is laced with doo-wop sensibilities, accompanied by tremolo and country stabs. Having worked with Peter Buck and Wilco's Glenn Kotche, rich compositions are expected, and *To Live A Life* brings the album back down to earth. A yearning, wintery track edging towards balladry, it shows their desire to experiment compositionally, featuring synthesised brass and a theremin. *Hem Of Her Dress* is a standout, solely for its spirited coda – a folk singalong embossed with brass and a chant that can't help but lift your mood. The orchestration helps push *Ruins* out of the 'folk/country' box, with the use of horns, mandolin and pedal-steel frequent. It's an album as suited to summer evenings as it is cold January afternoons. **SR**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE: *The Everly Brothers, Laura Marling*

The James Hunter Six
WHATEVER IT TAKES

Renowned Essex soul singer James Hunter has never shied away from luxuriating in the vibes of the genre's 60s heyday, and for his third record with the James Hunter Six, he's dived even further into the retro deep end. Recorded with Daptone Records founder, Grammy-nominated producer/engineer Bosco Mann (of Amy Winehouse's *Back To Black* fame), the authentically vibed soul tracks here sound as if they could have been cut in 1967, not 2017. As you'd expect, the blasting horns are the star of many songs here, such as *Whatever It Takes* and *Mm-Hmm* – with James' syncopated acoustic stabs helping the songs bounce along nicely. That's not to say there aren't moments where the guitar cuts loose, however – *I Got Eyes* has a wonderfully frenetic spanky solo, while *Blisters* sees the amp cranked up for a filthy Albert King-style blues. The star of the show, however, is Hunter's voice – powerful, raw and soulful, it illuminates these tracks with authentic warmth and conviction. **JG**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE: *JD McPherson, Lee Dorsey, Albert King*

The Dangerous Summer
THE DANGEROUS SUMMER

When The Dangerous Summer split up in 2014 amid a acrimonious public spat between frontman AJ Perdomo and rhythm guitarist Cody Payne, it felt like rock music lost a band on the cusp of something special. Second album, *War Paint* saw the Marylanders honing their anthemic hooks and skyscraping post-rock-inspired guitars into a potent force, but that potential was unfulfilled – until now. Returning as a three-piece following Payne's legal issues, TDS are in the mood to finally realise that promise. Their self-titled fourth picks up where they left off – the punky energy and fist-in-the air chorus of *Ghosts* reminds us of the power of Perdomo's throaty vocals, while *Luna* shows off the majestic scope of Matt Kennedy's ethereal delay-heavy guitar lines. TDS might not yet be ready for rock's top table, but if they keep producing music of this calibre, this unlikely comeback could be the stepping stone to big things. **JG**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE: *Jimmy Eat World, Thrice*

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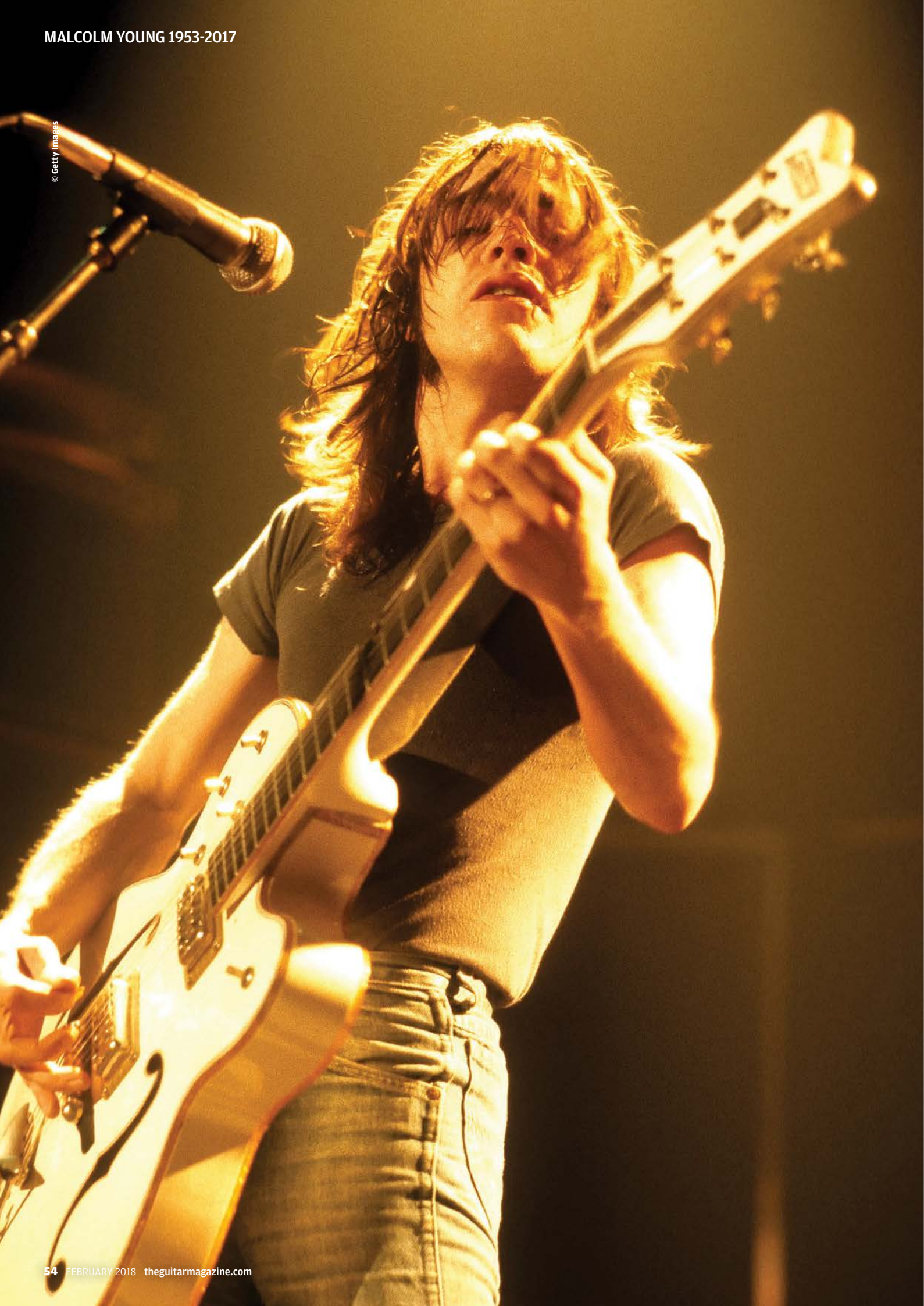

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Young playing his legendary stripped '63 Gretsch Firebird

MALCOLM YOUNG

1953-2017

When Malcolm Young died on 18 November 2017, the world lost a founding member of one of the world's most influential rock bands, but also one of the most important guitarists of all time, too. **MICHAEL STEPHENS** examines the legacy of one of rock's true unsung heroes...

Look over the last four decades of Greatest Guitarist Ever polls in music magazines, and the name Malcolm Young is rarely to be seen – the Australian commanded scant column inches in comparison to his younger brother, Angus. Yet after his passing in November 2017 at the age of just 64, almost immediately, those same publications were acclaiming Malcolm Young as 'one of the greatest'. It's an all too familiar tale.

It was perhaps a different matter for many guitar mags and websites, who have long saluted Malcolm's huge impact and influence on rock music. His fellow members of AC/DC were of course under no illusions of his greatness either – not least brother Angus, who put those publications right, even in grieving. Malcolm was a great. Malcolm was the *greatest*. Malcolm Young was the heartbeat of AC/DC itself.

Rhythm King

Naturally, to the band and their hardcore fans, Malcolm Young was a lot more than just a great rhythm guitarist. It was Malcolm who first formed AC/DC, after all. The Youngs were all musical: eldest brother George would find success with 60s combo The Easybeats, and his siblings followed him. George would later become AC/DC's co-producer.

"Me and Angus were playing guitar already, even before we left Glasgow," Malcolm told US journalist Gary Graff in a rare interview. "We were playing because all the brothers played

© Getty Images

Malcolm was the bedrock of AC/DC live until his retirement in 2014

guitar; that was the thing you did. But you certainly got the idea in our heads, by [George] doing well with his band, you sort of quietly dreamed about it, that you could do it too, one day." Malcolm characterised the brothers' childhood experience as beautiful simplicity itself, just like their later music: "You learned to talk and walk and play guitar. We were playing guitar before The Beatles, actually – picking up on surf instrumental tunes and things like that, doing them with the open strings because our fingers weren't big enough [to create] the pressure so you could get a big sound out of these big old acoustic guitars, cheap ones. We used to just fudge around, find the notes. It was from doing that we picked up the kind of heavy thing that became our sound."

Malcolm later explained that he played guitar like he did purely because he was trying to emulate Little Richard's piano style. Indeed, there's a popular AC/DC rumour that the band never recorded anything unless it could be played, rock 'n' roll-style, on the piano. Like Chuck Berry fanatic Angus, the Young brothers – despite some supposed proto-heavy metal credentials – were incredibly old fashioned, and happily so.

"If Mal sits down to play a solo, he can do it better than me. Not a lot of people have picked up on this, but in the early days he used to play lead"

The Quiet Man

Because Malcolm didn't care for speaking to the press – "You don't think about rock 'n' roll, you just do it" – and because he was no extrovert like his brother, many assumed it was Angus with the lion's share of the talent. But Angus would later reveal, "If Mal sits down to play a solo, he can do it better than me. Not a lot of people have picked up on this, but in the early days he used to play lead." Indeed, you should check out the track *Show Business*, 1975, on the *Family Jewels* box set for proof of this.

The solos were just glitter anyway. It was the songs – those titanic chords and riffs – that made AC/DC so special. And they were always at least co-written by Malcolm. He co-wrote lyrics, too. The reason AC/DC never sanctioned a Greatest Hits album? It was Malcolm's decision; he insisted it would signal both a rip-off for fans and a lack of moving forward. That's right: even though every album's riffs were relentlessly similar to what had come before.

Stage right – always stage right – wearing jeans and a t-shirt, looking like an errant teen hooligan pummelling his 1963 Gretsch (aka The Beast) and jerking his leg to the driving beat, Malcolm was always the same on stage with AC/DC. He'd yelp the occasional backing vocal. But in essence his job was simple. If AC/DC was

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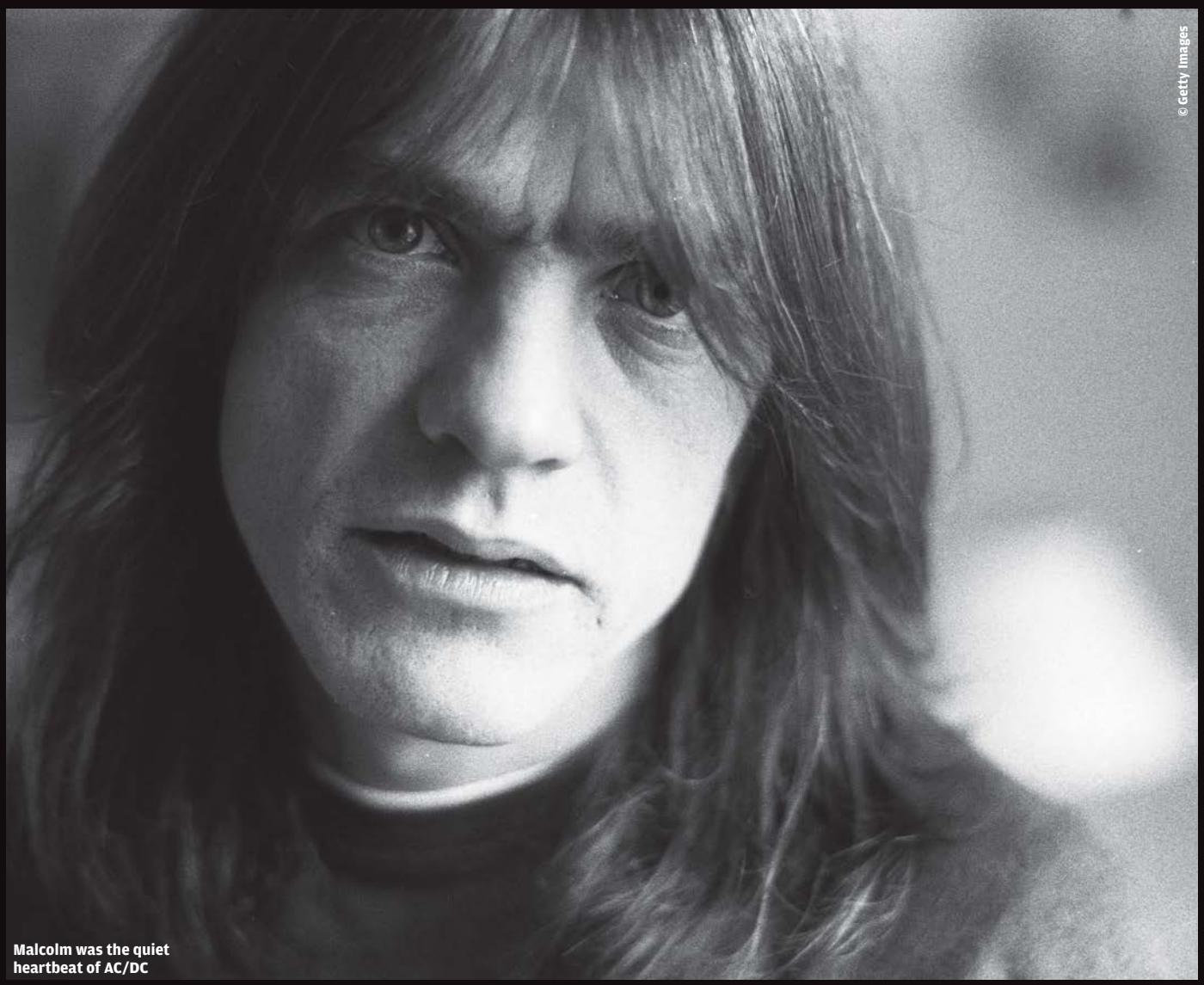
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Malcolm was the quiet heartbeat of AC/DC

a juggernaut, he was the driver. He had his hand on the accelerator and, sometimes the brake. He was the engine. Or, as Angus once put it, "He's like a friggin' human metronome."

Simple Genius

You could spend all day analysing the simple genius of AC/DC riffage, but for Malcolm at the top of his game, listen to 1978's gloriously lean *Powerage*. *Rock 'N' Roll Damnation* is AC/DC in excelsis, and has no real solo; *Down Payment Blues* shows how Malcolm was more important than the drums in propelling AC/DC. *Riff Raff* and *Sin City* are rifftastic, *Gone Shootin'* is tight but loose. *Powerage* is Keith Richards' (and apparently Slash's) favourite AC/DC album, and for very good reason.

Throughout, Angus was never short in heaping praise on his older (although not "bigger") brother. "He's probably got the best right hand in the world," Angus once told *Guitar World*. "I've never heard anyone do it like that. Even Keith Richards or any of those people. As soon as the other guitar drops out, it's empty. But with Malcolm it's so full."

Soldiering On

After Malcolm officially stepped down in 2014 – he simply couldn't do it anymore – AC/DC soldiered on. They'd just completed one album without him, *Rock Or Bust*, patched from demos Mal and Ang had sketched out: but without Young elder, it was tellingly the shortest AC/DC album ever released.

"It was pretty hard," Angus later told *Guitar World* in one of the few interviews that he was prepared to do. "I was doing a lot on my own. Especially for guitars, Mal was always my best critic. No matter what producer we worked with, I always looked to Mal at the end if I played a guitar solo or a little break here and there. And he was always the one to say 'yea' or 'nay.'" Malcolm had given his blessing for the band to continue and tour *Rock Or Bust* when he couldn't, but now Malcolm's gone for good? In meaningful terms, it's goodbye to AC/DC.

"Malcolm was the embodiment of rock itself. He laid down the simple solid guitar truth that taught us all about the 'less is more' ethic"

Of all the tributes that flooded in following Malcolm's death, it's perhaps an unexpected one that ended up summing the man's musical contribution up most eloquently. Heart's Nancy Wilson said: "Malcolm Young was the embodiment of rock itself. His rhythm guitar style needed no embellishment. He laid down the simple solid guitar truth that taught us all about the 'less is more' ethic. The wild power of simplicity and the head-banging hair-flipping joys of turning it up really loud and dancing with the vibrations. Thank you, Malcolm, for being the real deal."

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ฝรั่ง

Platinum-selling LA power-pop outfit Weezer are back with a brand new album, *Pacific Daydream*, which gives greater emphasis than ever to the unique guitar relationship between frontman Rivers Cuomo and sideman Brian Bell. **JOSH GARDNER** caught up with the pair on their recent UK tour to discuss their roles in the band, and the equally individual gear that they choose to use...

Keep Fishin'

Photography **Eleanor Jane**

For over two decades now, Weezer have been troubling airwaves and arenas all over the world with their unique brand of guitar-driven pop. But while the basic Weezer recipe is a beautifully simple blend of classic chord progressions and singalong choruses, the band have endured when dozens of imitators have fallen by the wayside, chalking off 11 studio albums in the process. But none of those wannabes had Rivers Cuomo...

The embodiment of an awkward musical genius, Weezer's bespectacled frontman isn't just a wonderful songwriter with a knack for a catchy pop hook – he's also a guitarist who grew up worshipping at the altar of 80s heavy metal, and he rarely wastes an opportunity to demonstrate that he can shred a neoclassical solo with the best of them. The flipside of the Weezer guitar coin is Brian Bell – Weezer's second guitarist is a perfect foil to his band leader, holding the whole thing together with sensitive guitar parts and perfectly judged vocal harmonies.

The complimentary differences between the pair's guitar styles is clearly in evidence on Weezer's latest album, *Pacific Daydream*. The record, which was released at the tail end of last year, has some of the most unusual guitar work seen during the band's 24-year existence, with layered acoustic guitars, lo-fi blues-rock licks and retro slapback all in evidence in hitherto unseen quantities. It's quite a departure from a sound

Rivers' three stage guitars – his trusty Warmoth S-types 'Mei' and 'Satsuki', and his Gibson SG, 'Courtney'

that fans would associate with the band, but it speaks to the way the pair's guitar relationship has developed over time.

When we caught up with the pair before their gig at Manchester's 02 Apollo at the end of 2017, we were keen to pick the pair's brains about the way they work together as guitar players, and also about the unique and iconic guitars they were strapping on for that evening's show...

Wind In Our Sail

Despite Weezer having been active and touring for most of the last 20-odd years, they haven't spent a lot of time in Europe in the last decade or so – aside from a quick two-date jaunt in 2016, before this tour they hadn't done a significant string of dates in the British Isles since 2005's *Make Believe*. But having done a proper run this time, the pair are clearly energised by the experience.

"I don't think I've ever enjoyed myself so much in Europe," exclaims Bell as we sit down to chat. "I feel so comfortable here – I wish we didn't have to go, really!"

"We're doing interviews and people tell us how long it's been since we've been here and we're surprised," Rivers chimes in. "Time has flown by and we feel like we've been negligent in our duties as a touring rock band! We want to do more now."

Despite having a new album under their belts, we're surprised to hear that they've resisted the temptation to play too many new tracks in the ever-evolving setlist.

"We don't do too many new songs – right now we're just doing *Happy Hour* and *Feels Like Summer*," Rivers explains. "Our last album [2016's The White Album] is pretty new, too, so we're doing *California Kids*, *King Of The World* and *Thank God For Girls*. There are some kids that know the words already, and that's fun – but for the most part I think people are still trying to catch up!"

"Before the tour you think, 'Oh yeah, this'll be great! We've got all these new songs and we'll do five new ones every night...' but once you get out on the road it's just like nothing matters except the joy of the audience – that's all that matters to you. So everything changes to adapt to your audience – you just want them to have the best possible time."

> "Once you get out on the road it's like nothing matters except the joy of the audience – you just want them to have the best possible time"

Fall Together

Watching the pair perform their fan-pleasing set, it's clear that Brian and Weezer have clearly defined roles when it comes to the guitar side, but that doesn't mean they necessarily agree on what that is all the time...

"We're very complimentary," Rivers explains. "I'm kinda like the backbone of the guitar sound – lots of downstroke powerchords, and I play very consistently through the song. Then Brian is like a total loose cannon – much more jagged and sloppy, playing from the hip-style."

"A loose cannon? Interesting..." Brian chuckles. "Alright I'll take that."

"His part generally don't repeat much," Rivers clarifies. "His second verse is different to the first and so on. It makes for a fun listen for me as we're performing. Then when it comes time for the guitar solo, I take over and go full-on alpha-male guitar guy!"

"On the record I actually think I'm quite the opposite – I'm coming in with very defined parts," Brian notes. "I'm a piano player first and foremost, so I could always read music, ever since I could read English – I learned to read music around the same age. A lot of musicians don't read music, or they don't want to learn to read music, but I never had that – so I decided that I'm proud of that and I'm going to use that knowledge. I love notating – I enjoy it, it's almost like solving a puzzle. If I come up with a part or hear a melody I use that process to help me come up with the idea – putting the notes to paper, I see the patterns. Whatever it is, you can look at it on the stave and maybe try to physically invert it and see what happens – that kind of thing can really work sometimes."

Most of Rivers' guitars are covered in stickers given to him by fans

Rivers uses DiMarzio and Seymour Duncan pickups in his guitars

A Rivers runs through it: Cuomo has been using Kempers live for the last year or so

My Best Friend

In addition to being one of the most interesting guitar players of his era, Rivers has spent most of his career playing some truly unique instruments. Go back to the band's first video – the Spike Jonze-directed *Undone (The Sweater Song)* promo – in 1994 and you'll see him playing a pale blue S-type guitar that's most certainly not a faithful version of Leo's classic design. "They never seem to work for me," says Rivers of his aversion to stock Fender Strats. "They don't have the power that I need."

Instead, Rivers got his guitar tech at the time to create an S-type for him that would suit his hair metal-worshipping guitar style. The original guitar pulled together a Sonic Blue Warmoth hardtail S-type body, 22-fret Warmoth neck with rosewood 'board, Sperzel locking tuners and a potent combo of a Seymour Duncan TB59 in the bridge and a DiMarzio Super 2 in the neck, and a Black Ice onboard overdrive unit taking the place of the tone control.

The resulting guitar would be Rivers' ever-present companion on stage (gaining some crudely taped Van Halen stripes along the way) until it suffered a nasty blow on stage in 1997, leaving the body with a 10-inch crack. Blue had to be retired, and in its place several replacement Warmoth S-types were ordered, including a black one he used on their second self-titled long-player (The Green Album), and a blonde one that legend has it now contains the innards of the original Blue...

In recent years, however, Rivers has leaned heavily on two of the original Warmoth replacement guitars – a Sonic Blue model that's primarily a backup, and his go-to weapon of choice, the sticker-covered Seafoam Green guitar he refers to in *Back To The Shack* as 'The Strat with the lightning Strap'.

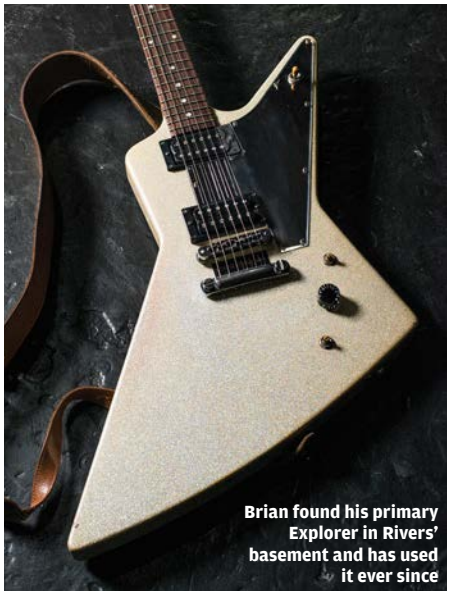
"Up in the studio I usually use a Les Paul Junior," Rivers explains – indeed it was a Junior providing most of the sounds on the band's superlative debut, The Blue Album, in 1994. "That's the sound of Weezer in the studio, but for years now it's mainly been the green one live. My green one is named Mei, and the blue one is named Satsuki – those are the two girls in [Hayao Miyazaki's legendary animated classic] *My Neighbour Totoro*. As I got more guitars, I had to give them names!"

Both guitars have identical basic spec – with the same neck, body wood, tuners, and his tried and tested combo of TB59 and Super 2 humbuckers – but the green guitar, Mei, that always wins out for him.

"There's not a *big* difference but there is reliably a difference that *I* can hear," Rivers explains. "Occasionally I'll do a blind test. I'll turn my back and have somebody else play all my guitars while I sit in a room my amplifier, so I can't see which guitar they're playing. I rate all the guitars, and every time, the same guitar wins for me – I have no allegiance to it at all, but it always wins!

"There's so much I love about it – definitely the sustain and the crunchy rhythm sound... and the size of it – it looks cool on me! And I like the gentle colours."

Brian handles guitar and keys duties in Weezer


Brian found his primary Explorer in Rivers' basement and has used it ever since

Brian's backup guitar is surprisingly ideal for acoustic simulator work

"I'm kinda like the backbone of the guitar sound, but when it comes time for the guitar solo, I go full-on alpha-male guitar guy!"

Speaking of colours, it's getting hard pushed to tell quite what colour either of the guitars are underneath the myriad stickers that Rivers ends up covering all his instruments. "The stickers are all given to me by fans," Rivers chuckles. "So they dictate what goes on there!"

Space Rock

Despite his association with S-types, however, Rivers takes to the stage that evening playing a striking white Gibson SG that he's had in his rack for the best part of 13 years.

"I just switched back to my SG a few shows ago!" Rivers exclaims. "I first started using SGs in 2005 for the *Make Believe* tour, because I had a dream about it! I had a dream that I was playing a white SG, and in the dream it felt incredible, so I started using it!

"I'd been playing my Strats for years again, but then just the other night one of them went terribly out of tune, I don't know why. So I went to the side of the stage and swapped it out with my backup SG, which I hadn't played in years, and it felt great! What I mainly love about it is that it's much lighter weight, and it's much easier to be a frontman with that guitar – to run around and do rock poses with – so I've been using it ever since!"

Like his Strats, he's got his favoured TremBucker 59 installed in the guitar's bridge, but despite the custom nature of many of his instruments, Rivers isn't obsessing about gear minutiae when he's off stage. "I'm not technically very knowledgeable," he admits. "I just know what the sound is and how I want it to feel, and then I let the techs take care of it from there!"

Unlike his other guitars, however, Rivers' SG isn't covered in stickers, though it does have one or two prominent adornments – including some Thai script behind the bridge.

"That is a word in the Thai language the word, which is farang," Rivers explains. It means 'creepy white foreigner' [it's a slang term for tourists/foreigners in Thailand – Ed]. That one's actually named Courtney, and when you flip it over, there's a big picture of Courtney Love on there!"

No Other One

While Rivers' gear is all deeply personal and tailored for his needs, Brian takes more of a utilitarian approach to his touring gear, bringing out a pair of tried and tested Gibson Explorers. "The Explorers aren't even mine!" Bell exclaims. "So I care about them, but then I don't care about them – they're like battleaxes. They're so sturdy that if they fall they'll probably hurt whatever they hit! Whereas my vintage SG... if that thing falls it snaps immediately! Or my vintage Telecaster – it's a great guitar but just for the studio. But these guitars are workhorses, y'know? They can deal with travel and extreme weather conditions."

His primary guitar for this tour is certainly an interesting choice – a champagne sparkle-finished guitar with a mirrored pickguard that came to be Brian's main stage axe in a roundabout way.

"During The Green Album period I just found this in Rivers' basement," Brian recalls. "I was like, 'What are you even doing with this?' and he says, 'I don't know, you can use it if you want'. 'Okay, cool!' Then a few years ago he wanted it back so I ended up getting a Les Paul Junior, and it was great but it was still for the studio – it wasn't reliable enough for the road. Then he ended up switching back to the SG and then back to his Strat, so I just sort of took it back, and he never said anything, so I've kept it ever since!

"I don't actually ever take it home – it's in the band's tour stash, and whoever wants to use it can, but I just happen to use it whenever we're on stage. I've used it in the studio a few times, but it's usually my vintage Gibson SG – I have a 1964 that's just so versatile, it has every sound I could ever want in one guitar.

"The Explorer is an extremely flamboyant guitar – it has a mirrored pickguard, it's sort of ironic in a way... like, are they serious with this thing? And so the strap is a gold snakeskin thing, too, made by my friends at Coppperpeace. So it's kinda become my

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Brian keeps his Matchless Independence in an iso cab for live use

BRIAN'S BOARD

Rivers eschews pedals for his live rig, but Brian still keeps a small board on hand...

"I've definitely found that less is more live," Brian explains. "For this record [producer] Butch Walker had every effect, and while it often enhances, sometimes it can detract.

"I keep things fairly simple. The original RAT is great for cutting through. The Holy Grail is better than any Fender reverb I've ever heard. I did stick a rotary pedal on there this time, but our sound is primarily singing - it's vocal harmonies and counter-melodies - so you can't be lost in a swirling mess of switching on and off effects.

"The Black Balls distortion is there because I want a different kind of sound for *Back To The Shack*. I originally bought it when I was on a day out in Brooklyn, and I it was one of those, 'Oh I've got 80 dollars burning a hole in my pocket' situations, so I thought 'Well there must be great music stores in Brooklyn'. I think I bought this probably more because of the the name...

"I have to have the talkbox as well - we'll use it for *Beverly Hills*, and I use it for the beginning of a song called *King Of The World* - but these are spices that you don't want to use too much of!"

guitar – when you're on stage you want people to see your guitar!"

As a backup, Brian has another Explorer – a sticker-covered black one that again isn't one of his own, "I wouldn't normally cover my guitars with stickers, but we happened to have these in our collection of touring gear, and I needed a backup guitar," he notes. "It turns out this black Explorer is perfect for the songs that I'm using an Acoustic Simulator on. Which is surprisingly amazingly good for being a little stompbox that changes your electric guitar to an acoustic and does it somewhat convincingly – it's certainly easier than switching to an acoustic guitar!"

Take Control

When it comes to amplification in a live setting, the two couldn't be more different – Rivers opts for a digital approach while Brian keeps things all-analogue with a Matchless Independence combo.

"That thing is awesome – it was James from Maroon 5 who told me about them," Brian remembers. "He hooked me up with one of their artist reps back during the making of *Make Believe*. They're such a great amp – when we have to rent gear it's hard because it's a rare amp to find. But I'm not much of a gear head any more, I care more about the notes, the purpose behind the notes. I think that definitely comes from my piano training and my theory training – I think it gives me something of a unique approach to guitar."

Interestingly, that love of theory and notation is evident on the Matchless, where Brian has taped some hand-written staves to the top of the Independence.

"Sometimes we'd do *Only In Dreams* and the part I'd play was always this kind of nebulous thing," Brian explains of the staves. "I wanted it to be a little more defined and I had that there for a cheat sheet. I love the way that the end of *Only In Dreams* sounds like its free but also composed, and to do that you have to rely on everyone else doing that same thing as you... and that doesn't always happen! There was something so hard to memorise about that secondary part, I just needed to have it there as a reminder. Rivers is the same – he has notes all over the stage for lyrics, he'll make cue cards... even though your eyes can't really focus on it under the lights on stage!"

Perfect Situation

Far from the boutique valve-powered sound that Brian uses live, Rivers has recently swapped his well-travelled Diezel heads for a pair of Kemper Profiler heads – and the Weezer frontman has found that digital modeling has come a long way since he used Line 6 POD racks for his amp sounds in the early 2000s...

"We started about a year ago," Rivers explains. "It was a factor that it's much easier to ship gear around, but there are more important factors. One is that I was finding it hard to keep all the elements of my sound consistent from show to show, playing different venues. I like to eliminate as many variables as possible so that I can keep fine-tuning my sound and make improvements. With the Kemper you're starting with the exact same sound every day, which is very appealing to me.

"Also, our sound guy prefers the Kemper – and that's the most important thing. When you play it side by side with my regular gear, which sounds better out in the audience? And he preferred the Kemper!"

Convenience and consistency aside, it also gives Rivers the freedom to use modelled versions of his studio amp sounds on the road, and has enabled him to dispense with a pedalboard, too.

"I use the Kemper's octo-verb and the distorted chorus sound, and a chorus-y clean sound – I've got probably 10 different sounds on my footswitch," he explains. "It's fun to get into it, too – I can go real deep on it! Our new album has some very different guitar sounds than I've ever had before. There's a song *Weekend Woman* that we've been playing, and the guitar sounds nothing like anything I've ever had before – but with the Kemper I can model that sound and have it right there on my footswitch."

Weezer's new album, *Pacific Daydream*, is out now on Atlantic Records

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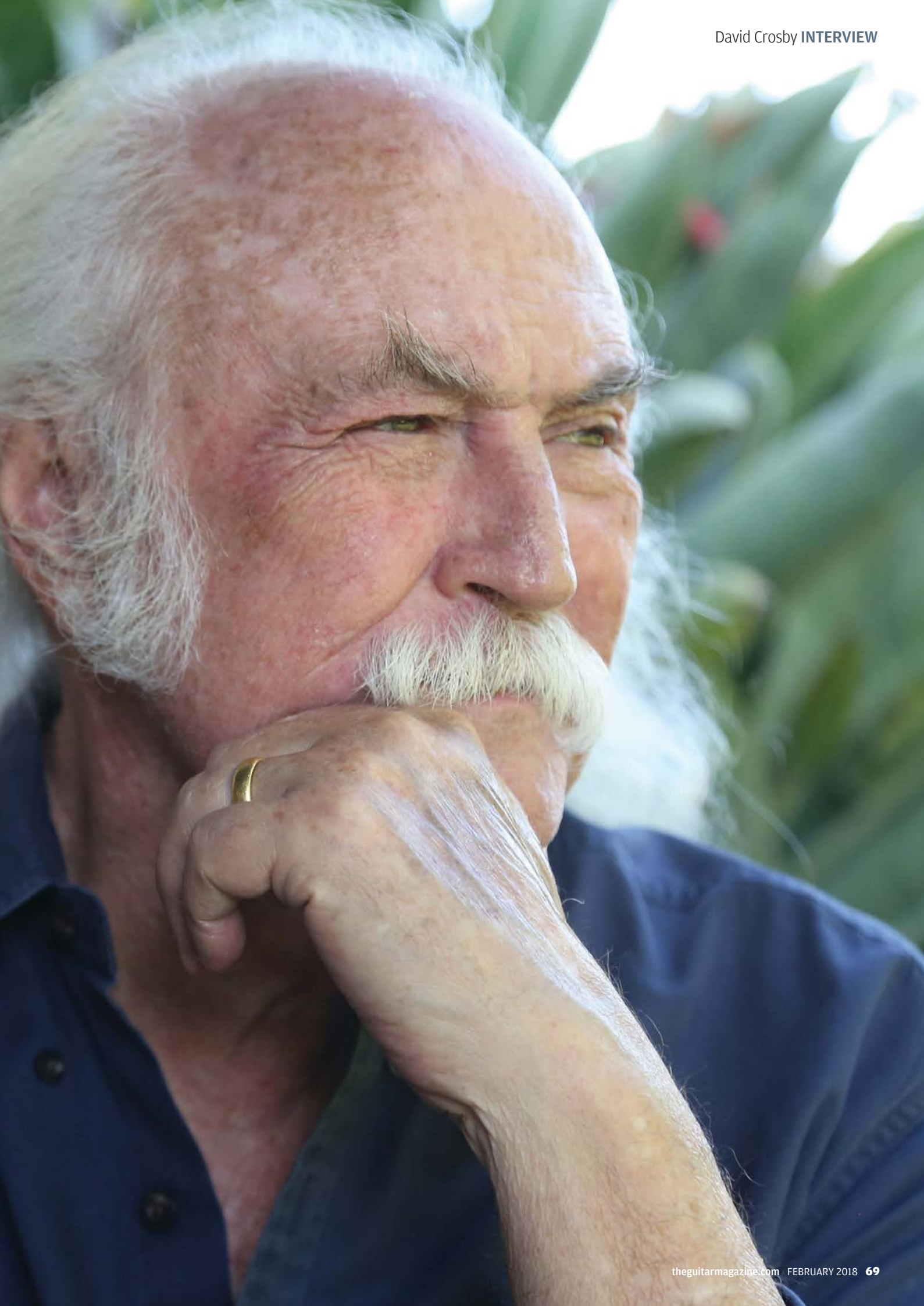
Back To The Garden

As he returns with a brand new album, *Sky Trails*, legendary singer, songwriter and guitarist David Crosby is still on a worthy musical journey. He sits down with **TERI SACCONE** and explains how he's rediscovered his joy in music...

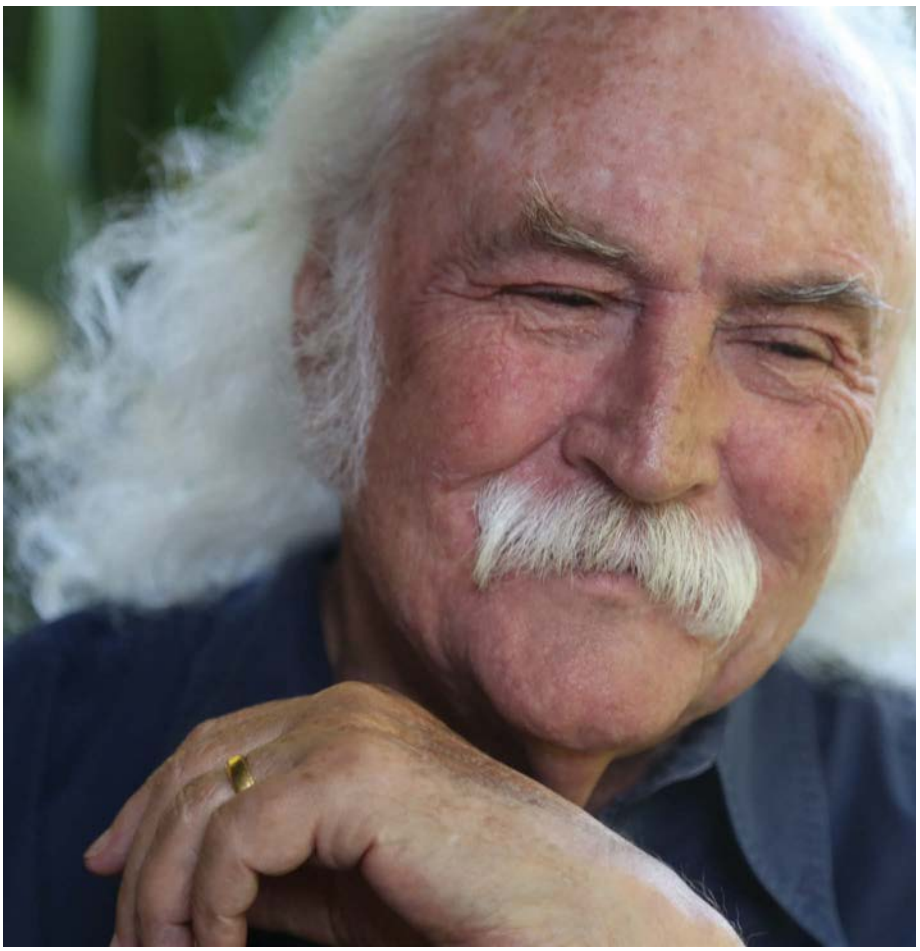


David Crosby's landmark musical contributions span five decades and a variety of different projects, including The Byrds; Crosby, Stills & Nash; Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young; not to mention his ambient SoCal solo work.

His is an artistry that has permeated not just the wider culture of his homeland and beyond, but also the soul. Yet unlike many of his peers from classic rock's golden age, Crosby is not content to luxuriate in his past glories, no matter how impressive. Instead he prefers to push forward with new material, his vigorously creative mind always focused on the next thing. Perhaps it's that drive to keep working that finds him so satisfied – as we begin our conversation, he positively radiates contentment, and is endearingly open and gracious throughout.

Crosby is right to be pleased with himself – his latest album, *Sky Trails*, has been lauded far and wide, and demonstrates not only his continued evolution as a songwriter, even at the age of 76, but also that his voice hasn't lost any of its resplendent lustre. Released just 18 months after his previous album, *Lighthouse*, *Sky Trails* is dreamily panoramic, ambitious and focused – a testament both to how Crosby has reconnected with his muse following his CSN departure, and to the fruitful songwriting relationship he's developed with his son, James Raymond.

"I started this as we were still working on *Lighthouse*, because I'm always writing songs. I can't stop," Crosby explains of his prolific recent output. "James is now my main writing partner. The *Lighthouse* record was a joy to do [together], but then these songs appeared at the same time, and I can't resist working on songs that happen creatively like that, it's been a very productive period."



"I think I was a little jammed up creatively towards latter CSN. We grew apart, and it was no longer fun. I need it to be fun!"

Jammed Up

While the disintegration of Crosby, Stills & Nash was ugly at times, Crosby feels ultimately things worked out for the best. "I think I was a little jammed up creatively towards latter CSN," he admits. "We grew apart, and it was no longer fun. I need it to be fun! Plus I can't just keep turning on the slot machine and performing our old hits. That's *not* okay."

One of the tracks on the multi-textured *Sky Trails* is a cover of *Amelia*, by his one-time paramour Joni Mitchell – a challenging vocal performance...

"Yes, it's daunting," he admits. "I loved that exquisite song for years – ever since she wrote it. She's the greatest living singer-songwriter and there's no question about it. As good as Bob [Dylan]. Furthermore, she's even a much better musician than her songwriting. I've wanted to do that song a long time and how she weaves the story of Amelia Earhart within her own love life is so unique, so I took a swing at it and sang it very simply compared to her. The words are spectacular."

Crosby has written a few decent songs himself in his solo career, however, and perhaps none more so than 1971's *If Only I Could Remember My Name*. Even now, he retains a fondness for the evocative pedal-steel used on the track.

"I do love it," he affirms, "I got [Grammy-winning pedal-steel player] Greg Leisz on board for this album. He's pretty terrific and as a steel player he's melodic with a feeling for country, world music, jazz, rock. He has a wider spread than most pedal players do."

No Discipline

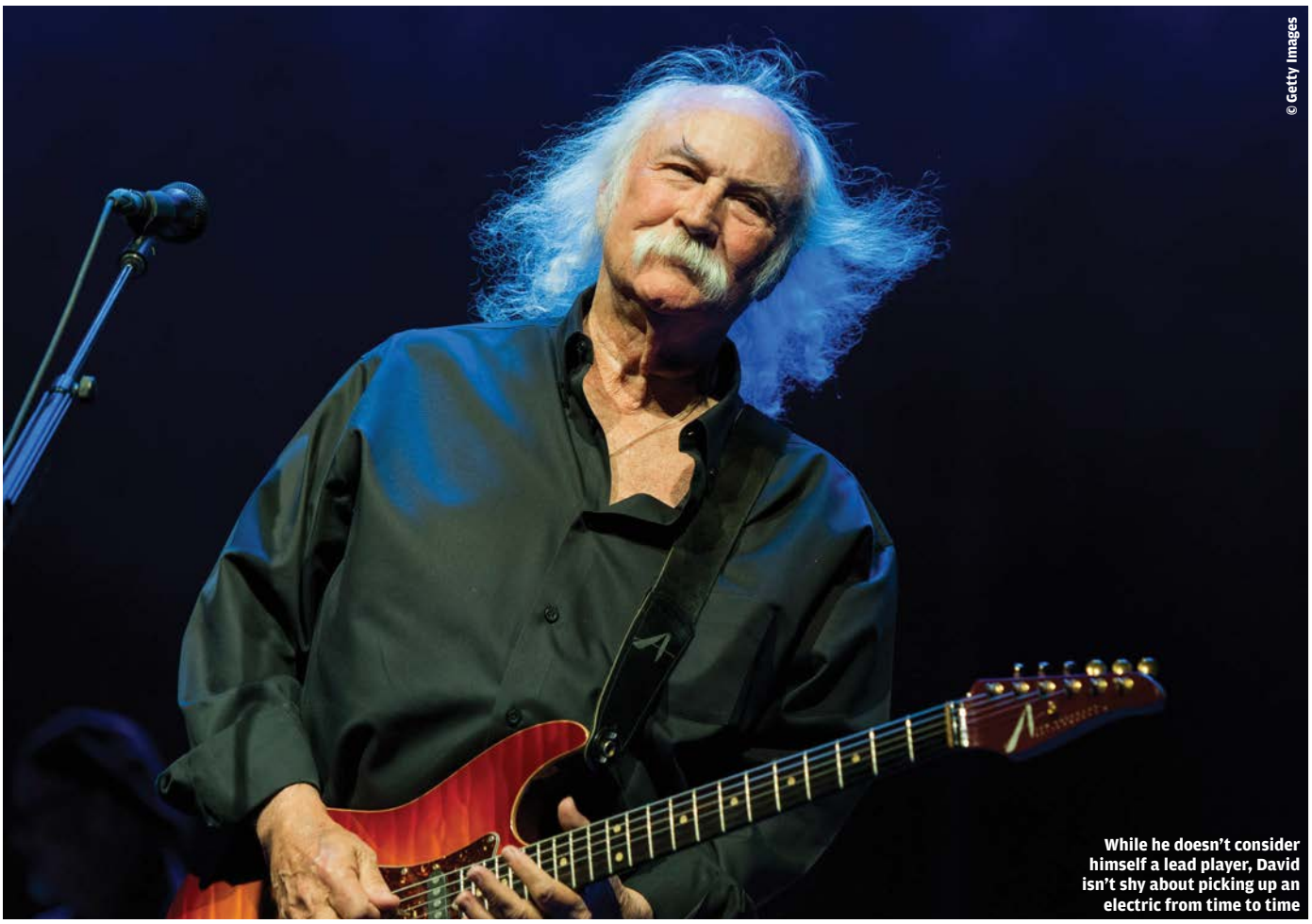
When it comes to songwriting, Crosby doesn't need to discipline himself to write, as he's developed a habit that has served him well for a long time now. "I write every day and I save up bits of words in a big book," he explains. "I learnt that from Joni way back when. She taught me to write good stuff down to save it for songs. That's brilliant. When I find something I can use in there, it might also spark other lyrics – or a whole verse. For me the words are the hardest part. I play guitar every night and keep five guitars in different tunings in my bedroom, so I'll pick one up and start fooling around to see where it goes. If it takes me someplace I've never been before, I end up writing a song. I don't take it for granted, though. It's hard to come up with decent lyrics if you want to take then across an emotional bridge not of the basic variety. It's fun, but it's not easy to do well."

Crosby's acoustic playing is indelibly associated with his interesting altered tunings, and as a result he has to have a lot of guitars kicking around the house.

"I play McAlister acoustic guitars, and I have several of them," he enthuses. "They're quite possibly one of the best solo makers in the world – stunning guitars. I've also got three '69 Martins that I've had since 1969 – D-45s. Two of them I take on the road all the time, so between the Martins and the McAlisters I'm happy. Obviously, I'm not a lead player: I'm a picker. My strength is writing songs in strange tunings. *Guinnevere* and *Déjà Vu*, for example."

© Getty Images

Crosby is a big fan of his old Martins, and is famous for his clever use of altered tunings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While he doesn't consider himself a lead player, David isn't shy about picking up an electric from time to time

Star On The Right

While he might not consider himself a great lead player, David has worked alongside some pretty stellar electric guitarists in his time – from Roger McGuinn to Neil Young and Stephen Stills – and this has given him a unique perspective on the role...

"Lead players who elevate themselves above the pack are those who grow past the pentatonic blues scale and start playing pure melody," he insists. "Beck, Gilmour, Clapton, Hendrix and Hedges: they could play anything they dream up because there's no distance between fingertips and brain. They can play anything they desire. That's where the rubber meets the road – the guitarists who are forever legends."

It's not just lead guitar players either: Crosby has played with some amazing musicians of every stripe over his long career, but there's one that stands out for him – the late, great Michael Hedges. "Oh god I loved that," he enthuses. "I think that he's the best acoustic player I ever heard in my life, anywhere."

These days, Crosby's appetite for collaboration is unquenched, and he enjoys working with players who you might not expect him to work with, such as Michael League of fusion jam-band, Snarky Puppy, who contributed to the *Lighthouse* album. "It was inspiring," Crosby recalls. "Michael is an amazing guy as well as a musician. It's as though you have your palette of five colours to paint with and with another songwriter you then have at least double that.

"I know people who won't collaborate because they can't mesh with others or they want all the credit. But I love it. I'm picky as hell, but I found people so good I can't resist it. I like the process."

Raymond's impact on the album is more than just some nifty piano work, however. Crosby admits that James drew music out of him that he would never have expected, and the song *Curved Air* is a prime example. "That song is a true story about a guy who got blown up in Afghanistan," Crosby elaborates. "It's a strange song, and James decided he wanted to take it to the flamenco space but he did that on a keyboard, so it's a guitar sample on a keyboard."

> "I love collaborating. I'm picky as hell, but I found people so good I can't resist it. I like the process"

Tomorrow Today

Another artist that Crosby has enjoyed an enjoyable relationship with is jazzer Michael McDonald, who co-wrote the track *Before Tomorrow Falls On Love* from *Sky Trails*.

"I had a set of words and went to Michael and he added some beautiful words and music to it," Crosby explains. "It's a jazz ballad. And he wrote stuff I'd never have been able to write. He's a craftsman who likes to work on a song. He lives nearby so I'd go over to his house, he'd come to mine to work on my piano. What a really great musician. That's my son on piano playing the parts Michael wrote."

The topic of the song is a deeply serious and affecting one, and something that clearly resonates with Crosby as he looks back on his long and eventful life.

"War is a downward force on the human race that brings out the very worst in humanity," he reflects. "Music is an uplifting force and brings out the best in us. So playing music is a good deed. What the Jews call 'mitzveh' and that thrills me to no end."

David Crosby's new album, *Sky Trails*, is out now on BMG

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GEAR REVIEWS

As we write this, the team is getting ready for the biggest guitar event of the year – Winter NAMM. We'll return from Anaheim with the hottest new gear of 2018 to show you, but in the mean time, there are still plenty of cool new products to get to grips with. The Deimel Firestar Custom shows that there's plenty of life in the retro-reimagining craze, Manson shows us that futuristic designs are alive and well, while Blackstar and PRS have revamped some of their most popular products. It's a sumptous appetiser, but come back for 2018's gear main course next month!

Deimel Firestar Custom 76
High-end Jazzmaster-meets-Firebird from Germany

Manson Guitar Works MA-25 Anniversary Edition 80
A multi-coloured celebration from the UK guitar maker

Gretsch G5435 Limited Edition Electromatic Pro Jet 84
Affordable single-cut from the iconic American brand

PRS SE Bernie Marsden Signature 2017 LTD 86
Bernie's popular signature is revived and revamped

Black Volt Amplification Crazy Horse 88
Boutique US-made combo with stunning unique looks

Blackstar HT Venue Mk II 40 & 60 92
The Brit firm's new stage-ready combos get a once-over

DV Mark DV Raw Dawg EG 96
Eric Gales puts his name to a pocket-sized signature head

Alvarez AD60 98
Entry-level dread with quality in its timbers

Art & Lutherie Legacy Tennessee Red 102
Vibey retro looks meet affordable modern build methods

House Of Tone Tru PAF Humbuckers 107
Intimidatingly faithful PAF-alikes under the microscope

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DEIMEL GUITARWORKS **FIRESTAR CUSTOM**

Quirky looks and even quirkier electrics make this German boutique creation a guitar for the true individualist – but will it flick all the right switches for **RICHARD PURVIS**?

The North American Guitar is a London-based retailer that specialises in bringing mouth-watering electric and acoustic instruments across the Atlantic and into the arms of grateful British pluckers. In this instance, though, someone's gone to the wrong gate at Heathrow and ended up in Berlin. Not to worry, because luckily enough the nearby town of Märkische Höhe, close to the Polish border, is where Frank Deimel builds his distinctive high-end guitars.

If you insist on a North American connection, Lee Ranaldo and The National's Bryce Dessner are Deimel fans – and perhaps more pertinently, there's some US-made hardware playing a key role in this Firestar Custom model: a Mastery bridge and vibrato system, which offset fans will know are commonly used, stability-boosting upgrades for the Fender Jazzmaster and Jaguar.

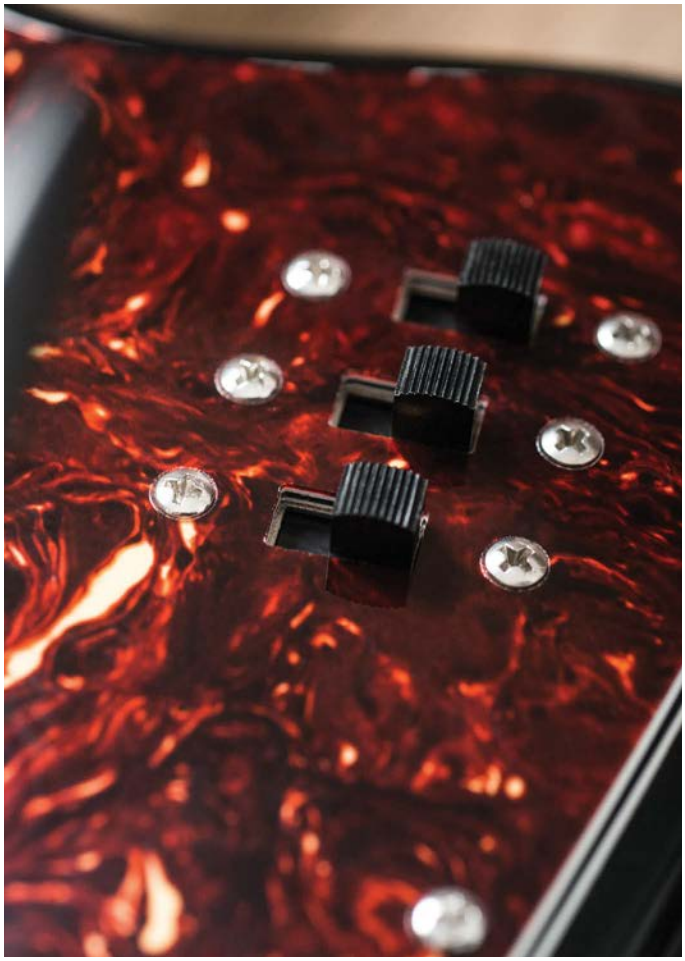
There are other elements of those guitars in the Firestar's design, too – from the swamp ash body's offset waist to the layout of the controls on that expansive scratchplate – but the name hints at another influence: the non-reverse Gibson Firebird. You can certainly see this in the body's silhouette... although the headstock has the tuners along the bottom edge and is therefore, er, non-non-reverse.

The Firestar's neck is probably as hefty a chunk of maple as you'll find on any 21st century six-string

On the whole, however, taking into account the 25.5-inch scale length, bolt-on neck and (mostly) single-coil pickups, this a Fender-type guitar with some Gibson touches rather than the other way round.

Chamfers for both forearm and ribcage suggest Herr Deimel has the player's comfort at heart, but if you've got dinky fingers take note – the neck is an absolute behemoth. The ebony fretboard has an ultra-modern compound radius and the heel is nicely curved for access to the upper frets, but this is probably as hefty a chunk of flame maple as you'll find on any 21st century six-string.

And those pickups? They're Deimel's own: two single coils plus a humbucker at the bridge. That's not even half the story of this guitar's electrics, though. A standard three-way switch lets you choose between bridge, neck and a blend of both, but it's the three Jaguar-style slider switches on the lower bout that really open up your options. One knocks out the neck-side coil on the 'bucker for skinnier, more jangly tones; one adds the middle pickup to all three positions for some Strat-like quack;



Deimel
BY

and one brings in a piezo pickup that's disc-shaped and mounted not under the bridge but inside the body. We have absolutely no idea what to expect from this...

In Use

The Firestar emerges from its Hiscox case pretty much in tune, but you'll be praying it stays that way because those upside-down tuners take some getting used to. They're spaced liked a standard six-in-line set but feel closer together than they really are, simply because the angle makes it harder to keep your thumb out of the way.

A quick acoustic strum puts us back in a very good mood – guitars with this kind of bridge are never going to be all about sustain, but it's distinctly more ringy than the average Jazzmaster, with bags of midrange clang. And while that narrow neck pickup might look puny, it's clearly been sneaking into the gym after school: through a clean amp we hear some of the plunky offset character that you might expect but it's smoother and more powerful, especially on the lower strings.

The humbucker serves up a surprisingly Les Paul-like slap given the Fender-derived construction, combining perfect top-end clarity with plenty of body in the lower mids. Splitting the coils brings a breezier tone that's especially useful for thinning things out in the 'both' position, but either way it's well matched with the neck unit.

Here's another quirk of the Firestar's unorthodox design: for all those fruity switching options, you can't actually hear the middle pickup on its own. Still, it plays its part: mixed into the bridge or neck it adds a heavy dose of quackiness, but it's arguably at its best in the middle position, where you'll find a somewhat less phasey blend of all three at once.

We hear some plunky offset character but it's smoother and more powerful, especially on the lower strings

And that just leaves the piezo. The fact that this sound changes slightly with the pickup switch suggests it's blending with the magnetic units rather than replacing them altogether, but the overall effect is very, very different. It's a tone that's fiendishly hard to describe... which is unfortunate for those of us being paid to do just that. Somehow dark and bright at the same time, it's warm and woody but oddly stifled in the higher frequencies, with more Stratty phase cancellation and a pronounced acoustic-like zing on the wound strings. You could say it's fun – ultimately we're not sure what we'd actually use it for, which is a feeling that's reinforced by the sense of stepping out into the fresh air when you flick back to the regular pickups. That said, the endorsement of the aforementioned Ranaldo, Dessner and their ilk implies that Deimel is a brand for players interested in going beyond the familiar.

The Firestar responds beautifully to overdrive, as you'd expect from the purity of its clean tones. The humbucker in particular barks out with loads of midrange cut, while you can get super-soulful on the neck pickup. In piezo mode we're still intrigued rather than convinced, and microphony becomes more of a potential issue: the famous behind-the-bridge string resonance that so divides Jazzmaster owners is much more noticeable, and every little shuffle and tap against the guitar's body is clearly amplified. But let's be fair: this is a great-sounding guitar, and the limited applications of one of its many voices won't detract from its desirability.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Statement looks combined with top-class build quality
+ Plenty of tonal variety
+ Monster neck is great if you can handle it

– Piezo tones don't have an immediately recognisable use
– Upside-down tuners can be fiddly

A superbly engineered instrument that can be made to sound just as unconventional as it looks

8/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Your other options for an offbeat post-Jazzmaster concoction with three pickups include the **Bilt Revelator** (**£2,999**) and **K-Line Del Mar** (**£1,799**). If it's the piezo you're really after, another German brand might be able to help: the semi-hollow **Duesenberg Starplayer TV+** (**£2,259**) has one in the bridge

KEY FEATURES

Deimel Guitarworks Firestar Custom

- **PRICE** £3,650 (with hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody electric guitar. Made in Germany
- **BUILD** Swamp ash body with nitro finish; bolt-on maple neck with ebony fingerboard; 21 medium jumbo frets
- **HARDWARE** Gotoh vintage-style tuners, Mastery bridge and tailpiece
- **ELECTRICS** Deimel HB-AL5PE42 humbucker (bridge) and two Deimel T-90 single-coils plus piezo disc built into body; three-way switch, master volume and tone, switches for humbucker coil-split, middle pickup on/off and piezo on/off
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.7mm at nut, 52.3mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23.6mm at first fret, 25.6mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.6kg/7.9lbs
- **FINISH** High-gloss black (other colours available on request)
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No extra charge
- **CONTACT** The North American Guitar 0207 835 5597 **thenorthamericanguitar.com**

MANSON GUITAR WORKS **MA-25 ANNIVERSARY EDITION**

Manson has chosen to mark a quarter-century of high-class luthiery with one of the sparkliest guitars we've ever seen. **RICHARD PURVIS** prepares to sing for absolution...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

The Mansons have been making guitars since the 1960s, so what exactly is this 25th anniversary model celebrating? Well, 1992 saw the opening of Manson's Guitar Shop in Exeter, and that's where the modern era of Manson Guitar Works really began. Soon would follow the 'DeLorean' model made for local hero Matt Bellamy, and soon after that would follow international fame for this distinctive British brand.

And if you want to talk distinctive, let's discuss the finish on this guitar – a far cry from the rough metallic look of the Muse frontman's first signature Manson. It's called 'Night Sky Holosparkle', a name that manages to be both absurd and accurate at the same time: the twinkling highlights are assuredly star-like, and the way their colours shift across the spectrum as you turn the guitar around in the light is quite magical... if possibly not for everyone!

Beyond that, the basics of the MA-25 are much the same as a standard M-Series. The starting point is clearly the Telecaster – it's an alder-bodied single-cut design with bolt-on maple neck and 25.5-inch scale length, after all – but the Schaller bridge and tailpiece add a Gibson reference point, and from there on things get a bit more individualistic.

Is that a Les Paul pickup selector in the middle of the oversized upper bout? Nope, it's a killswitch – the pickup selector switch is down between the single volume and tone controls, which on our review guitar are fancy titanium ones (a £70 optional upgrade on the standard chrome knobs). And are those staggered tuners at the other end? Well, as staggered as you want them to be: they're Gotoh HAP (height-adjustable post) types, and have been factory-set with just enough space for three or four turns on every string.

This Manson really feels at home filling the supermassive black hole in your heart with big, heavy distortion

The neck profile is described by Manson as a 'soft V', and you can easily see why when you hold it up to the light: there's a distinct ridge along the back, with plenty of maple planed away on both sides to avoid 50s-style clubbiness and keep things widdle-friendly. The modern fretboard radius also helps with that – but you'd better be confident in finding your way around the upper frets because, while there are discreet dot markers along the top of the neck, no such clues have been left on the rosewood board itself. No, not even a glittery number 25 at the 12th fret.

Now, even if you're not a fan of bombastic alt-rock anthems, you've probably got some idea of what kind of tones a guitar originally designed for Matt Bellamy is going to be

KEY FEATURES

Manson Guitar Works MA-25 Anniversary Edition

- **PRICE** £1,849 (w/ hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody electric guitar. Made in Czech Republic & assembled in the UK
- **BUILD** Alder body with high-gloss finish; bolt-on maple neck with rosewood fingerboard (ebony outside EU); 22 medium frets
- **HARDWARE** Gotoh HAP tuners, Schaller tune-o-matic bridge and stop tailpiece
- **ELECTRICS** Psychopaf PF-1 bridge pickup, Psychopaf Dismissal neck pickup, three-way switch, master volume and tone, killswitch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 41.7mm at nut, 51.4mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20.7mm at first fret, 22.9mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.1kg/6.8lbs
- **FINISH** Night Sky Holosparkle
- **OPTIONS** Titanium control knobs (as reviewed, £35 each), onboard Z.Vex Fuzz Factory (£369), Sustainiac Pro Sustainer (£369), coil-tap (£55)
- **LEFT-HANDERS** £100 upcharge
- **CONTACT** Manson Guitar Works 01364 653751 **mansonguitarworks.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Muse fan on a budget? Try the **Cort MBC-1** (**£479**), a Manson Matt Bellamy signature model made under licence in Asia. The **Fender Jim Root Telecaster** (**£1,059**) is a metal axe disguised as a Tele; for a more traditional T-type with added beef, see the **G&L ASAT Classic** (**£1,739**)

gunning for. And even if you're not a fan of puns, you probably know what to expect from the hand-wound in England, Psychopaf pickups. Yes, these are hot puppies: a Psychopaf PF1 humbucker at the bridge, and a Psychopaf Dismissal – described as a single-coil-sized P-90 – at the neck.

There are some more optional extras to consider – including, for an extra £369, a Z.Vex Fuzz Factory built into the body of the guitar. Sadly the Korg Kaoss MIDI controller for crazy synth noises, as installed in several of Bellamy's own guitars, is not available as an option on this model.

In Use

Factory setup is maybe not exactly how we'd like it – the action's on the high side, and the tailpiece has been set so low that three of the strings touch the edge of the bridge on their way down – but a five-minute tweak will fix that, and anyway the overall playing feel is comfortable and the acoustic tone is smooth and airy.

Once we plug in (baby) to a clean amp, the sound in all three positions is fundamentally smooth and fat, with a nice sense of elasticity when you dig into single notes and just enough treble content to avoid accusations of dullness. Lower notes on the neck pickup have a good thump to them and, in true P-90 fashion, get pleasingly jazzy as you stray up the neck. The middle position offers a hint of cluck but nothing to rival a Tele or even a Les Paul – as we hinted earlier on, this is not a Nashville pickin' guitar – while the bridge humbucker takes all the goodness of the neck unit and adds a generous fistful of upper-mid bite.

The tone control doesn't do much for the first third or so of its travel, perhaps because it's taking out frequencies that aren't really represented on this guitar, but both knobs are smooth and usable in their own way – as is the killswitch (a three-way type for easy rapid judders) once you've whacked up the gain.

And that brings us to the place where this Manson really feels at home: filling the supermassive black hole in your heart with big, heavy distortion. Stomp on the nearest filth generator and you're rewarded with immense, velvety chords that ring out with near-infinite sustain, and single notes that cut through with clarity and precision. The tone stays crisp and solid on every fret, with no loss of midrange punch on the unwound strings even at the excitable end of the board.

The difference between pickups isn't huge here, but we highly recommend starting your show-stealing solo on the neck unit then slamming over to the bridge for a step up in excitement once you've really got going. You may never want to stop.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Tremendously punchy high-gain tones
+ Well made and highly playable
+ We love the sparkly paint job

– Not the most inspiring clean tones
– The price is a bit on the high side

With a full-on voice to match its festive finish, this is a Manson worthy of marking any anniversary

9/10

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BY · DENNIS · FANO

Rivolta Guitars is the latest creation from acclaimed guitar builder & designer Dennis Fano. New models Mondata, Mondata Junior and Combinata Junior due in soon. Combinata and Combinata Deluxe in stock.

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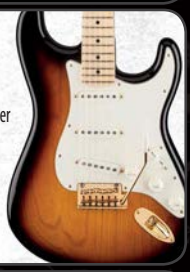

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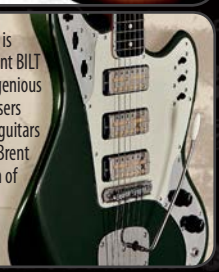

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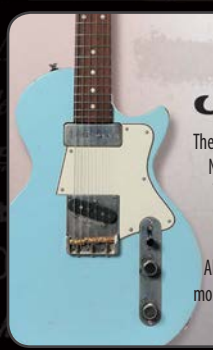

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Novo GUITARS

BY · DENNIS · FANO

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GRETSCH

GRETSCH G5435 LIMITED EDITION ELECTROMATIC PRO JET

Limited to just 250 pieces in Europe, will this affordable single-cut leave **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** feelin' blue?

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Although the Electromatics are no longer the most affordable Gretsch guitars – the sub-£400 Streamliners now hold that accolade – a series of updates in recent years has brought them closer to their 'grown up' stablemates in the Professional Collection.

Announced at back in July, you can get this limited edition G5435 in any colour you want as long as it's Fairlane Blue – you won't see this sucker for retro automobile colours complaining. Here, for the first time, a guitar in the Electromatic line features the Gretsch 'V' stop tailpiece, seen initially in the Streamliner series, but now in use on the Player's Edition Broadkaster and in the Custom Shop. It's a subtle nod to the Cadillac tailpiece on Penguins and Falcons and the V-cutouts on Gretsch-branded Bigsbys, but it's a much more stable string anchor.

Elsewhere the spec is familiar, with a chambered 47mm deep basswood body, arched maple top and a maple neck with a 12-radius rosewood fingerboard. Gretsch describes the neck as a 'Standard U' but in reality a nicely-rounded, medium-slim profile that anyone can get to grips with.

The pickups are a pair of Blacktop Filter'Trons with Gretsch's customary master volume on the lower horn, while individual pickup volumes, a master tone and a three-way toggle switch complete the picture.

In Use

A common affliction among single-cut electrics at this end of the market is a woolly neck pickup that makes dialling in amps for the right balance across all pickup positions a challenge. Happily, that's not so here – the Blacktop 'Tron has plenty of clarity, bite and Gretsch twang, but this can be smoothed out nicely with a tone control that's useful through almost all of its range; another rarity at this end of the market.

Flip over to the bridge and there's fantastic edge that takes you straight to Nashville with all your faux pedal-steel licks – then wind up the crunch a little and it's the Stones, AC/DC and beyond. It's great at band volumes as well as at home and, because the upper reaches of the fretboard are in contact with the body (rather than floating like a traditional Duo Jet) the additional coupling and transmission of resonance means that there's a smoothness of response and sustain in higher registers that's more Les Paul-like.

It performs remarkably well, with a harmonic complexity and dynamic response that's rare at this level

The Blacktop Filter'Trons perform remarkably well, with a harmonic complexity and dynamic response that's rare at this level. Don't be fooled by the price, this is a serious guitar. Get one while you can.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Very neatly built, feels dependable
+ Fabulous clarity and crunch that sounds heavenly with reverb
+ Outrageously good value for money
– Some still prefer the rollercoaster ride of a vintage-style Gretsch

One upon a time, Gretsch addicts used to view Electromatics as modding platforms – we wouldn't change a thing about this guitar

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Gretsch G5435 Limited Edition Electromatic Pro Jet

- **PRICE** £450
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-cutaway set neck electric guitar. Made in China
- **BUILD** Chambered basswood body with arched maple top, maple neck, 12-inch radius rosewood fingerboard with pearloid thumbnail inlays, 22 medium jumbo frets and a synthetic bone nut
- **HARDWARE** Adjusto-Matic bridge with 'V' stoptail, vintage-style tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Blacktop Filter'Tron pickups, master volume, master tone, bridge pickup volume, neck pickup volume, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.3mm at nut, 51.9mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.4mm at first fret, 23.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.5mm at nut, 50.8mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.3lb/3.3kg
- **FINISH** Fairlane Blue gloss polyurethane only
- **CONTACT** Fender EMEA 01342 331700 **www.gretschguitars.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Check out **Epiphone's 1956 Les Paul Standard Pro Goldtop** (**£429 street**). Also, even though it has a much higher ticket price, we've seen some seriously tempting deals for the **PRS S2 Starla** recently – Stevensville, Maryland goes to 1950s Brooklyn!

PRS SE
BERNIE MARSDEN SIGNATURE 2017 LTD

The Whitesnake founder's signature guitar returns to the stage. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** finds out if it's a beast of its own...

As co-writer of Whitesnake's most famous songs, Bernie Marsden's place in rock history is assured. We can also confirm that he has a stellar guitar collection and makes a cup of tea properly by warming the pot first. Anyone with more than a passing interest in UK guitar magazines will also know all about The Beast – his 1959 Les Paul that's one of the most photographed and familiar Bursts of them all, and the instrument on which mega-hits *Fool For Your Loving* and *Here I Go Again* were written.

Given his lasting association with the Les Paul, it was no surprise that Bernie's PRS signature – originally launched in 2012 – would be a take on the SE 245, a PRS Singlecut that's more Gibson-like both in its body thickness and scale length. Discontinued in 2016, this late 2017 BM redux sees it return by popular demand to mark three decades since *Here I Go Again* topped the Billboard Hot 100, though production is limited to just 300 units across Europe.

The major change is the new satin-finished neck – pick up the guitar and you'll notice that the gloss on the back of the headstock tapers to a point behind the nut to create a subtle 'stinger' effect. Marsden explains: "The chief tech at PRS Europe rubbed back the neck on one of my original Bernie SE's to make it satin and while I like the original gloss finish, I've been playing the satin one quite a bit more."

Though we're not too keen on the green hue of the vintage-style tuners, the headstock logo here is classier than on the original run, with Paul's signature given priority over the SE demarcation. Bernie's name now resides on the truss rod cover.

Aside from being very comfortable in rock scenarios, the Bernie's controls are responsive and musical

In Use

This guitar is fairly hefty but then so is The Beast – and with 1950s Les Pauls ranging anywhere between eight and 10 pounds, when it comes to this type of design, lighter examples aren't necessarily more toneful or resonant.

On the very best Les Pauls, wherever you are on the neck, it never feels like you are going to be left wanting when it comes to sustain. Although it would be unfair to expect the performance of an instrument that costs as much as a house from one that's £849, the PRS SE impresses in this regard with a long decay and piano-like bass in clean settings.

When your amp is set for drive and edge, aside from being more than comfortable in rock scenarios, the BM's controls are responsive and musical, with an array of pretty tones accessible when you roll back from 10. The volume controls don't darken the sound up too much when you back off, either. PRS guitars are often celebrated for their consistency and rightly so, but this model has plenty of vibe, too.

The Guitar VERDICT

+ Neat, high-quality build
+ A good blend of power and subtlety
+ Satin finish makes a comfortable neck shape even more appealing

– Only the green tuner buttons

A welcome, if fleeting, return for a much-loved artist collaboration

9/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

There's a wide array of sub-£1,000 Les Pauls available, but not with the wrapover/humbuckers combo. That said, we like the look of the **Gibson USA 2018 Les Paul Tribute** (**£849 street**). **Eastman's SB59 Goldburst** (**£1,399**) punches far above its weight among vintage LP-types

KEY FEATURES

PRS SE Bernie Marsden Signature 2017 LTD

- **PRICE** £849 (inc gigbag)
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody single-cutaway electric guitar. Made in Korea
- **BUILD** Mahogany back with carved maple top and flame maple veneer. Mahogany Wide Fat neck with 12-inch radius rosewood fingerboard with bird inlays and 22 medium-jumbo frets
- **HARDWARE** Vintage-style tuners, Stoptail bridge
- **ELECTRICS** PRS Designed SE Treble & Bass humbuckers with individual volume controls, master tone and three-way toggle selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 24.5"/622mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.8mm at nut, 52.9mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22.0mm at first fret, 24.8mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.9mm at nut, 51.8mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 8.8lbs/3.9kg
- **FINISH** Dark Cherry Sunburst (as reviewed), Vintage Sunburst, Grey Black
- **CONTACT** PRS Europe 01223 874301 **www.prsguitarseurope.com**

BLACK VOLT
AMPLIFICATION

BLACK VOLT AMPLIFICATION **CRAZY HORSE**

Eye-catching cabinets and a unique vibe have seen this LA amp company generate the right kind of buzz among A-list players. **HUW PRICE** saddles up the Crazy Horse...

The design, materials and technology utilised by Black Volt Amplification embrace the reclaimed and recycled aesthetic, yet although this model's name references Canada's most road-worn guitar hero, the Crazy Horse is not a 5E3 Deluxe clone. The Hammond transformers are bought in, but almost everything else about this striking amplifier appears bespoke.

Starting with the cabinet, it's made from reclaimed pine boards and the corners are mitre-jointed with oak splines for added strength. Despite the cabinet's generous dimensions, our Crazy Horse comes loaded with a single 10-inch Eminence Ragin Cajun speaker. With a sensitivity rating of 100.5dB, it's no shrinking violet, but a 12-inch option is also available.

If the boards are a nod to vintage Americana then the Old West picture is completed by the Navajo blanket that serves as a speaker cloth. The cab back is left open for easy access and the folded metal chassis has been treated to appear brown with rust – as if it has been marinating in a corner of a barn for decades.

Three enormous control knobs are mounted on metal dials that each go to 12 and are labelled treble, bass and volume. Together they look like something from a WWII submarine or a deranged scientist's laboratory. The standby switch seems surprising until you notice the absence of a rectifier valve. Like the power switch and fuse holder, it's hand-labelled with white paint – matching the writing on the inside cabinet wall that gives the model designation and serial number.

The Crazy Horse achieves amazing clarity, and enhances the most likeable aspects of our guitar's tone

A single input leads to two nine-pin preamp valves. V1 is an ECC83S and V2 is a long plate ECC803S that promises deep and tight lows with thicker and more complex midrange than a regular ECC83. Both are JJ branded, just like the cathode-biased 6V6 power valves.

Black Volt advises that both preamp valves can be swapped for the usual pin compatible alternatives and the power section can run 6L6s, with no need to re-bias if increased clean headroom is desired. For the purposes of this review we're also trying out the Crazy Horse in conjunction with the company's Maple Fuzz stompbox.

In Use

We can't resist the temptation to plug in the big orange Gretsch and kick into Cortez mode, but initially at least, the Crazy Horse sounds less loco than we expected. Vintage Gretsches are quirky beasts so we swap over to a Telecaster and things improve... dramatically. The Crazy Horse is immediately transformed, and it's into something that perhaps more closely resembles the dark sparkle of a 1950s Gibson amp circuit than a late 50s Fender tweed.

Without being edgy or harsh, the Crazy Horse achieves amazing clarity, but better still it enhances the most likeable aspects of our test guitar's tone and accentuates differences between pickups. The same thing happens when we change over to a Les Paul and despite the vastly

KEY FEATURES

Black Volt Amplification Crazy Horse

- **PRICE** £2,799
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-channel fixed bias valve combo, built in the USA
- **POWER RATING** 25W
- **VALVES** 1x ECC83, 1x ECC803S, 2x 6V6
- **CONTROL PANEL** volume, treble, bass, standby, power
- **SPEAKER** 10" Eminence Ragin Cajun
- **DIMENSIONS** 470x420x220mm
- **WEIGHT** 13.6kg/30lbs
- **OPTIONS** Black Volt's Maple Fuzz pedal is £400. The Crazy Horse is available with a 12-inch speaker for £3,200
- **CONTACT** Sixty Sixty Sounds 020 7813 9992 **www.blackvoltamplification.com** **www.sixtysixtysounds.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The amplifier repurposing and recycling craze that began in the states has reached UK shores: the **Oldamps Filmosound** is a rewired 1940s film projector amp head housed in a hand-built cabinet for just **£775**. **Tex Amps** and **At Mars Amplification** offer more refined, stateside takes on the same idea. All-new amps that draw on vintage tweed for inspiration seem more popular than ever; the **Rift Tweed 15TV** (**from £1,329**) and **Lazy J 20** (**from £1,699 + VAT**) are two of our favourites

different timbre of these two guitars, we feel no need to adjust the treble and bass controls.

Guitars that normally clean up without significant treble loss do sound darker than usual with the volume notched back – we conclude that the front end needs a certain level of input signal to work with, and while Fender- and Gibson-style pickups can oblige, lower output pickups such as Filter'Trons are less of a good match for the amplifier. This could be where the Maple Fuzz comes in – but more of that later.

Without the pedal, the Crazy Horse has an outstanding overdrive characteristic that sounds like it's centred in the upper midrange and layered over cleaner frequency bands either side. It manages to be both gritty and smooth with the discernible horn-like bark we hear in vintage Gibson circuits.

It's never harsh and even when overdriving near its limit, dynamics remain lively as the compression is largely confined to the overdrive areas. When the Crazy horse is turned up and the speaker and cabinet begin getting involved in tone generation, a pronounced midrange resonance becomes apparent.

It's a resolutely rootsy and old-school tone that makes you feel so connected with the amp that you may feel compelled to palm the plectrum and start picking with fingers and thumbs. The Crazy Horse cabinet's roomy proportions are clearly paying dividends – where a smaller cab might deliver boxiness and honk, here the voicing is something to enjoy rather than overcome. It's a big, loud sound too; any preconceptions you might have about what a 1x10 combo is capable of should be left at the door, while the wattage on tap means that it'll deliver in a louder band or bigger room than a 5E3 can cope with.

This 1x10 configuration of the Crazy Horse isn't an especially versatile amp – the volume and tone controls don't offer much interaction and the bass and treble controls are more refined than radical in operation – but instead you get a top-notch core tone that can be subtly sculpted and a gain range that goes from the prettiest cleans to rich overdrive. It stops well short of cranked 5E3 ferocity, but that's what the Maple Fuzz is for.

Engage the footswitch on the pedal's attractive maple enclosure and excoriating overdrive, bass sag, splatty breakup, an ultra-wide gain range and effortless sustain suddenly appear. Crank the fuzz and the volume, then you can clean up Fuzz Face-style while retaining clarity. The bias control is very sensitive and eases the decay from smooth and syrupy to dying battery-style splatter, while the Fat/Thin switch tightens the lows. The tone control is something of an oddity, because it acts as a second volume control.

We love the Crazy Horse's complex clean tones and it's smooth and refined breakup. Despite, or perhaps because of the circuit's treble and bass controls, it's not as versatile, gainy or sonically extreme as a similarly sized tweed combo without stompbox assistance. Nevertheless, it's certainly more practical in bigger rooms and it's an interesting and lovingly crafted amp that does what it does extremely well.

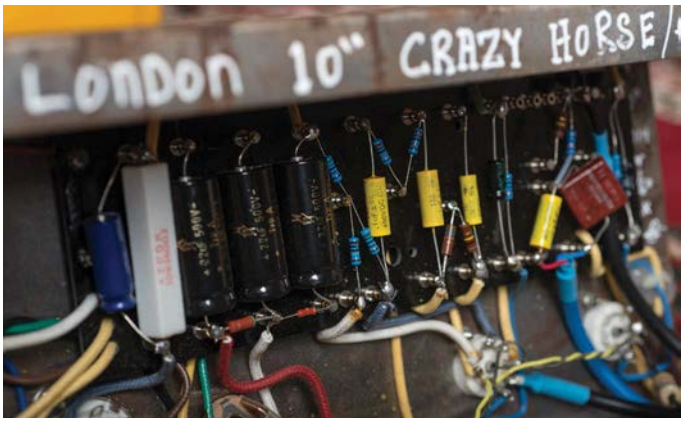
The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Beautiful cleans and refined overdrive with a complex, dark sparkle
+ A big sound for a 1x10
+ Fantastic looks offer something different in the 'me-too' boutique amp world

– There are more versatile vintage-style amps out there
– The current exchange rate makes the price of North American esoterica rather high

A blend of reclaimed, new and vintage materials with vibe in spades and serious tones

8/10



Black Volt head honcho Giovanni Loria and his helpful assistants

A custom hand-laced leather handle from an amp Loria made for Daniel Lanois

The rear panel of Black Volt's Whitey high-gain combo

INSIDE THE VOLT

We touch base with Black Volt's main man Giovanni Loria to talk timber, tubes and tone and discover how he went from repairing and modding amps for LA's premier pickers to building his own...

Q How did you make the jump from guitar player and amp tech to amp builder?

"I was repairing and modifying amps for about 15 years and when I started working for a few guitar shops here in LA, I decided to become more educated in the science of tube electronics. Aspen Pittman introduced me to an older electronics engineer called David Riddle and we really hit it off. I rent space in his warehouse and he has taught me a tremendous amount. That's how I took it to the next level."

Q It seems that you're a big fan of the old-school approach...

"Yes definitely, and a big part of what we do is recycle and repurpose. I might get pieces of old military gear at a swap meet, and because they're so big nobody wants the stuff. There's tonnes of great tubes inside, components, turret boards and capacitors.

"It takes a lot of time to dismantle them, but we can reuse components and many things never go bad. Some of the mica capacitors from the 1940s and 50s are bulletproof. So, the inside of my amps always look different. I've started using more modern components, simply to streamline the process, but when I do use the old stuff it's usually in the front-end because those are the components that really control the tone of an amp."

Q Your amps look different on the outside, too. How do you source the material for your cabinets?

"The cabinets are made from wood reclaimed from old-wood buildings – usually in the South. This guy in LA basically pays the landowners for the timber, dismantles the structures and brings the wood back in a truck. I get to select the wood I want to use from his yard. I think one of the biggest contributing factors to an amp's tone is the cabinet and this wood is beautiful. Some of it is hundreds of years old."

Q What can you tell us about the specifics of the Crazy Horse circuit?

"Well, they tend to change from amp to amp a little bit, because I personally voice each amplifier I make, but the basic platform for that amp is a Fender tweed circuit. I usually power them way up from the usual tweed stuff because an amp like a Deluxe will get squashed in a lot of band situations.

"So, I took what I felt were the best aspects of the tweed era, put them into my circuit and then changed the entire power structure. The 12-inch version has a truer, straight up tweed circuit but the 10-inch Crazy Horse has a different tone circuit with treble and bass."

Q Why solid-state rectification?

"As a player, I was always trying to get Marshall-esque tones out of Fender amps. I always loved Fender clean tones and tweed amps have great overdrive, but when you plug into a Marshall it's a whole other world of distortion. It's bigger, meaner and more aggressive.

"Marshall have mostly used solid state rectification and from a technical perspective, it gives you more voltage. With a tube rectifier you can loose up to 50 volts from the B+ supply but with solid-state rectifiers, you get that close-to-the-fingers attack and rawness. More electrified!

"We push 6V6s really hard because they're biased so hot, but they aren't pushed to the point where tubes burn out. I haven't had a single amp where that has happened."

Q Tell us about the Maple Fuzz pedal...

"All our pedals are completely hand-wired. The wooden case that the fuzz pedal is housed in is CNC-routed for us from a solid block of maple, then we put the components inside. The circuit is our own design with three different silicon transistors. With so much going on in the circuit, I didn't want to over-complicate things by trying to source vintage germanium transistors."

OVERDRIVE
OD EQUALISATION
REVERB
MASTER
POWER
STANDBY
POWER
GAIN
VOLUME
BASS
MIDDLE
TREBLE
ISF
LEVEL
VOLUME
ON
ON
HT CLUB 40 MkII
Blackstar

BLACKSTAR
HT VENUE MKII CLUB 40 & STAGE 60 212

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Blackstar gives its award-winning mid-price amplifier range an overhaul. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** checks out the new breed...

2017 was a big year for Blackstar Amplification. First, the company marked 10 years since its official launch at Frankfurt Musikmesse 2007. Despite a global economic backdrop that even the most generous commentator would describe as sub-optimal, the company soon outgrew the garden shed in which it was founded; today it's one of the biggest players in the business.

The second reason for Blackstar to be cheerful was the news of a successful management buy-out, allowing the company to remain independent and the founding management to own a majority stake. Soon after, a merger with Gordon Smith and Auden was announced, adding the respected British electric and acoustic brands to Blackstar's Dist-X arm that also handles the distribution of G&L and Alvarez in the UK and Ireland.

Then in October, Blackstar unveiled a new generation of it's best-selling and multiple award-winning HT Venue amplifiers. HT Venue MkII goes way beyond a fresh lick of paint – the Blackstar design team have spent three years reworking the range from the ground up and incorporating features requested by players. The challenge was to make the class of 2017 out-perform the class of 2010 – no mean feat considering that the original HT Venue Series includes some of the most popular affordable valve amplifiers on the planet.

The original HT Venue Series also included a 20-watt Studio model but it's been dropped time around, likely because the MkIIs come loaded with onboard power reduction... more on that shortly. Here, we're taking a close look at the 1x12 Club 40 and 2x12 Stage 60 combos. At a glance they appear very similar to their first gen counterparts, but there are cosmetic as well as electronic differences.

> The Blackstar design team have spent three years reworking the range from the ground up

The new range comprises the HT Club 40 MkII 1x12 combo (£699), the HT Club 50 MkII head (£599), the HT Stage 60 MkII in 1x12 (£749) and 2x12 (£849) combo configurations, and the HT Stage 100 MkII head (£749). These are accompanied by 1x12, 2x12 and flat and angled 4x12 cabinets ranging in price from £199 to £479.

Firstly, the new combos have been downsized for portability, making them slightly easier to fit in your car or van, and a fraction less dispiriting to load out of the bar at the end of the night. The Blackstar logo is a little smaller – seven years on from the first iteration of these models, the company is more confident and

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Orange's excellent-sounding **Rocker 32** (**£899**) is a 15/30-watt switchable twin-channel 2x10 combo with a stereo FX loop. Though the **Stone Deaf SD30 combo** (**£1,749**) is much pricier, it offers a hugely flexible combination of Brit valve tone and modern functionality, with 128 presets switchable remotely via MIDI. Fender's popular **Hot Rod Deluxe III** (**£829**) is loud, versatile and a great pedal platform

comfortable in its own skin, and it shows. Aesthetically, the whole package is classier, with the silver piping and silver and black speaker cloth hitting all the right notes.

On the inside, robust through-plated PCBs are the order of the day, with low-noise and valve longevity intrinsic to the design process. EL34 power stages are used throughout the series, and although these are hybrid circuits with some of the drive being solid-state in origin, the preamp channels utilise multiple valve stages and hot glass is ever-present in the signal chain.

All of the amps in the range benefit from digital reverb circuits with two new voices. The irresistible rise in the quality of DSP in recent years has seen many players – particularly those who use lots of gain – move away from traditional spring reverb. That's reflected here with a bright plate or darker room-style ambience on offer via a switch via the rear panel.

As previously alluded to, another new feature is a front-panel power reduction switch that provides a fixed level of attenuation equating to approximately 10 per cent of the full output power – ideal for home use and function gigs with draconian volume limits. If you are recording at home then the USB out allows you to send up to four channels of guitar signal to your DAW (including a dry signal for reamping), while in the more volume-friendly environments of a recording studio or big stage, the 12-inch Celestion Seventy 80 drivers have plenty of upper-mid punch.

As if all that wasn't enough, the optional five-button FS-14 footswitch (£69) gives you on-the-fly access to all of the channels and voices, a volume boost on every channel and reverb on/off. For gigs on the wrong side of the tracks, the HT Venue MkII amps also come with a Kensington Lock slot on the rear panel, allowing you to tether your amp to an immovable object such as a nearby handrail, or the lead singer's ego.

In Use

Perhaps it's the simplicity of a single row of knobs, but initially we're drawn to the Club 40. Powering up, the noise level is low. Beginning with the newly revoiced clean channel, you get a choice of British and American accents and bass and treble controls to adjust to taste. That voice switch is doing much more than flipping between preset EQ curves – preamp voicing, valve gain structure and power amp damping are all altered.

Both reverb algorithms are nicely musical and despite the lack of a spring sound, turn the reverb level above noon in either light or dark mode, select the Brit clean voicing and you can get some vibey 60s-style pop tones. Back off the 'verb and dial up the volume to around two o'clock and a Vox-like crunch comes to the fore. Plug in a good Tele and flip to the bridge and you'll find Petty, the Stones and the Club 40 at its most old-school. It's infectious stuff. Here, dialling back the treble a little works best, but flip over to the American clean sound and you'll want to do the opposite – cranking the gain and adding treble delivers tweed-like character and pleasing but less strident crunch.

All this before you even flip over to the OD channel – when you do, it starts at AC/DC and goes to infinity and beyond from there. With OD 1 engaged we enjoy the string separation and dynamics offered by keeping the gain level around nine o'clock, and there are also a great deal of sculpting options available thanks to the mid control and ISF. OD 2's modern voicing lives up to its name and supplies huge gobs of filth with girth and grind for chords and more than enough gain for pinch harmonics.

The 60 takes over where the 40 leaves off, adding more power, spread and control courtesy of the global presence and resonance controls and extra OD voicings. We'd sooner have a middle control on the clean channel, but players influenced by the dynamic alt-rock produced by the likes of Simon Neil and Matt Bellamy will find having a variety of flavours of dirt at their feet to be a real boon. Blackstar knows its market – we'd wager that if you liked the HT Venue series amps before you'll find the MkII versions even more versatile.

KEY FEATURES

Blackstar HT Venue MkII Club 40

- **PRICE** £699
- **DESCRIPTION** Hybrid valve/solid-state combo with two footswitchable channels and four footswitchable voices. Made in China
- **POWER RATING** 40W/4W
- **VALVES** 2x EL34, 2x ECC83
- **CONTROL PANEL** 1/4-inch jack input. Clean channel: clean volume, clean voice (American/British), bass, treble. Overdrive channel: overdrive channel on/off, OD gain, OD voice (classic crunch/super saturated lead), OD volume, bass, middle, treble, ISF. Master: reverb, volume, power (40W/4W), standby, power on/off
- **REAR PANEL** 3x speaker outputs (1x 16-ohm, 1x 8-ohm or 2x 16-ohm), emulated output mono balanced XLR, emulated output stereo jack (emulated outputs remain active in standby for silent recording or practice), emulated output cabinet switch (4x12 closed back/1x12 open back), reverb dark/light, effects loop level (+4dBV/-10dBV), effects loop return, effects loop send, 5-way footswitch socket, 2-way footswitch socket, USB, Kensington Lock
- **SPEAKERS** 1x 12-inch Celestion Seventy 80 speaker
- **DIMENSIONS** 588 x 480 x 260mm
- **WEIGHT** 24kg/53lbs
- **FOOTSWITCH** FS-15 included, optional FS-14 (£69) for control of channels, voices, boost and reverb
- **CONTACT** Blackstar Amplification 01604 817817
  www.blackstaramps.com

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Killer rock tones, huge versatility
+ Excellent value for money
– A mid control on the clean channel would widen scope for vintage fans

The popular gigging amp just got even better and more flexible

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Blackstar HT Venue MkII Stage 60 212

- **PRICE** £849
- **DESCRIPTION** Hybrid valve/solid-state combo with three footswitchable channels and six footswitchable voices. Made in China
- **POWER RATING** 60W/6W
- **VALVES** 2x EL34, 2x ECC83
- **CONTROL PANEL** 1/4-inch jack input. Clean channel: clean channel select switch, clean volume, clean voice (American/British), bass, treble. Overdrive 1 channel: OD 1 select switch, OD 1 gain, OD 1 volume, OD 1 voice (classic/modern). Overdrive 2 channel: OD 2 select switch, OD 2 gain, OD 2 volume, OD 2 voice (classic hot-rodded/modern). OD 1 and OD 2 EQ: bass, middle, treble, ISF. Master: reverb, resonance, presence, volume, power (60W/6W), standby, power on/off
- **REAR PANEL** 5x speaker outputs (1x 16-ohm, 1x 8-ohm or 2x 16-ohm, 1x 4-ohm or 2x 8-ohm), emulated output mono balanced XLR, emulated output stereo jack (emulated outputs remain active in standby for silent recording or practice), emulated output cabinet switch (4x12 closed back/1x12 open back), reverb dark/light, effects loop level (+4dBV/-10dBV), effects loop return, effects loop send, 5-way footswitch socket, 2-way footswitch socket, USB, Kensington Lock
- **SPEAKERS** 2x 12-inch Celestion Seventy 80 speaker
- **DIMENSIONS** 707 x 520 x 260mm
- **WEIGHT** 29.4kg/65lbs
- **FOOTSWITCH** FS-15 included, optional FS-14 (£69) for control of channels, voices, boost and reverb

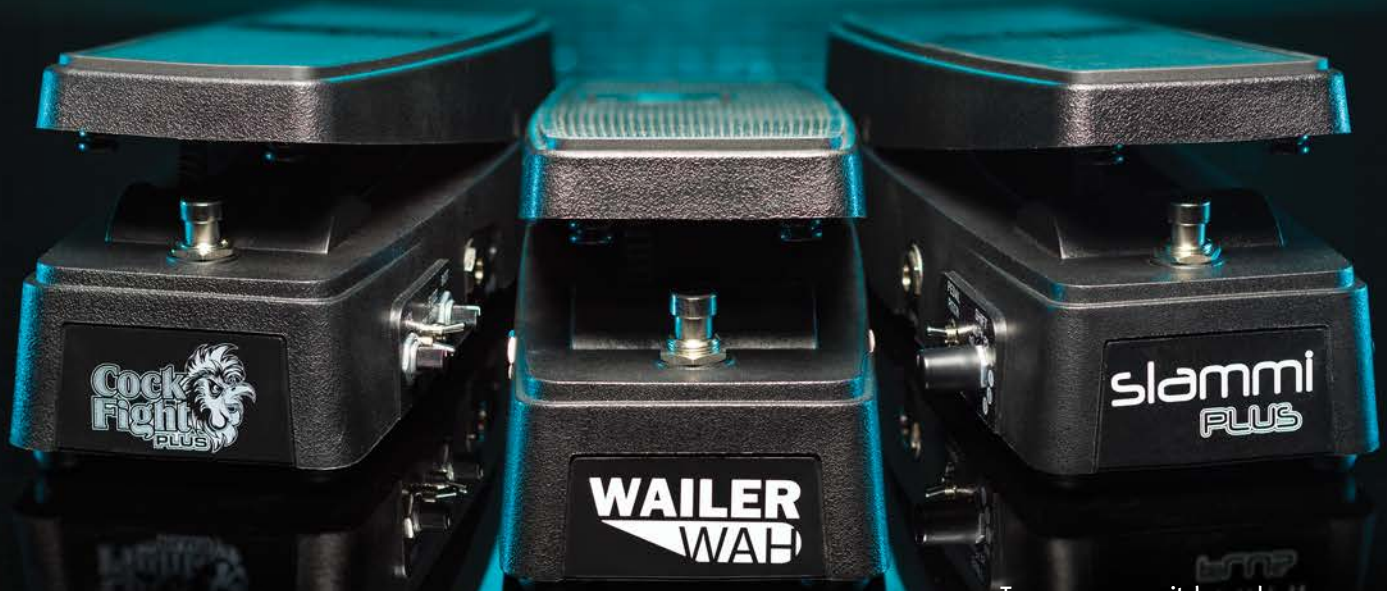
The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Even more versatile and controllable than the Club 40
+ More headroom for crystal cleans
– Could be too much amp for some

Most players will find the Club 40 sufficient but if not, this is the answer

9/10

SOUND BETTER. PAY LESS.



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DV MARK
DV 'RAW DAWG' EG

Created for blues ace Eric Gales, this hybrid amp promises huge clean tones from a box the size of a sawn-off cereal packet. **RICHARD PURVIS** scales up his expectations...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

KEY FEATURES

DV Mark DV 'Raw Dawg' EG

- **PRICE** £469
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-channel hybrid head. Made in Indonesia
- **POWER RATING** 250W into 4 ohms, 150W into 8 ohms
- **VALVES** 6205 preamp valve; solid-state output stage
- **CONTROL PANEL** Guitar input; bass, mid, high, reverb; footswitch input for reverb bypass and mute (TRS)
- **DIMENSIONS** 252 x 227 x 80mm
- **WEIGHT** 2.6kg/5.7lbs
- **CONTACT** MSL Professional 020 7118 0133
  dvmark.it
  mslprofessional.co.uk

One day, shaggy-haired scientists will invent a guitar cabinet that sounds exactly like a 4x12 but folds away into a Gucci handbag. Until then, for those of us who need to move more air than a lightweight 1x12 combo can manage, the only answer is to keep on lugging around the usual multi-speaker spine-warpers, and do our best to make life easier by pairing them with smaller and smaller heads.

DV Mark may well be able to help us with this mission. This is, after all, the sister company of Markbass, whose ultra-compact bass amps did the four-string fraternity such a game-changing favour a few years ago by sounding more fantastic than had previously seemed possible from such a small footprint.

The guitar head market might not be quite so ripe for revolution, but the 'Raw Dawg' EG has a clear ambition to set a new standard in performance per kilo. A stripped-down head that weighs in at under 3kg, its solid-state output stage – DV Mark's own proprietary MPT type – claims to belt out 250 watts through a four-ohm cab, or 150 watts through eight ohms. However you choose to reduce that figure to come up with a rough valve equivalent, this should be loud enough for pretty much anyone in 2018. And it isn't even entirely tubeless: there's a 6205 subminiature valve on preamp duty.

So, what does the 'EG' stand for? Assuming you've been shrewd enough to hold onto your back issues of the world's most indispensable magazine, pull out March 2017: in there you'll find an interview with Eric Gales, hailed as a prodigy at the age of 15 by none other than Carlos Santana. Raw Dawg is his nickname – also found on his signature Magneto guitar – and this is the amp he came

> Don't worry about volume. With the right cab, this thing will knock the heads off statues

up with in collaboration with DV Mark supremo Marco De Virgiliis.

If you're wondering where the gain control's gone, you'd better look at the floor – this thing is all about clean power and headroom, and any overdrive is going to have to come from your pedalboard. So we just get a single volume knob and a three-way tonestack, plus a control for the onboard digital reverb. The knobs themselves are something like chickenheads but, to keep things in scale, smaller and stubbier. Can we call them budgieheads?

There's a footswitch input for bypassing the reverb, but a standard on/off type won't do – you'll want a double switch with a TRS plug, as there's also a mute function hiding in here. That might not be at the top of everyone's dream feature list, but it could prove useful for mid-gig tune-ups or guitar swaps.

Round the back we find a cooling fan, an effects loop send and return, a DI output with switchable 6dB attenuation, and a pair of speaker outputs: one jack and one Speakon. This latter is clearly a hangover from the Markbass line – we're sure there is such a thing as a guitar cab with a Speakon connector, but you may have to swim to the bottom of Loch Ness to find it. Anyway, a quarter-inch jack will plug into the central part, so you do effectively have two standard outputs available.

In Use

We're not big fans of fans – they're never quite silent, and so need to be kept away from mics – but the whir from this one isn't going to bother anyone at gigging levels. The operating noise floor of the amp itself is impressively low when we start strumming at 'only just on' levels, and it doesn't take long to discover this is a fine-sounding head.

The emphasis is on big, spacious, blooming bottom end – there's plenty of this going on through every speaker cab we plug the Raw Dawg into, and for a well-balanced tone we soon find ourselves pulling the bass down to nine or 10 o'clock and pushing the treble up to two or three – but that's not to say the top end lacks sparkle. A Telecaster's bridge pickup cuts through beautifully, as does the twinkly cluck of its middle position, and everything has a sticky sweetness that's quite addictive.

As there are only five controls, it's just as well they each earn their keep. This is especially true of the mids knob, which allows for thumpingly solid tones when pushed high and glassy shimmer when dialled back. You're never far from a pleasingly pure tone with this amp – and that goes double when you whack up the volume. We often talk about valves in relation to the warmth of their overdrive, but it might well be that the 6205 in here is playing just as vital a role in lending depth and realism to tones that are virtually distortion-free. Oh, and if you are worried about that solid-state power amp's ability to generate sheer loudness, don't. With the right cab, this thing will knock the heads off granite statues.

The reverb is provided by an Accutronics module that, according to the maker's own specs, is a straightforward substitute for a spring-driven unit. It certainly does provide plenty of springy texture, but there also seems to be a hint of modulation in there – and we're not complaining, because it sounds great. Whether it's the right kind of reverb for straight Chicago blues is another matter, but you'll get good results from this amp playing many other styles of music – and we're sure Eric won't mind.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Absolutely impeccable big, bold clean tones
+ Compact and practically weightless
+ Really nice onboard reverb
+ An excellent pedal platform

– A little bit of crunch would have been nice

If you like your amps simple and prefer to get your overdrive from pedals, this ultra-portable and affordable head is a real winner

9/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Also pleading for a space in your smallest backpack is the **Quilter 101 Mini Head** (**£315**), a solid-state amp with five-way voice control and headphone output. The floor-dwelling **BluGuitar Amp1** (**£569**) is another with a mini preamp valve, and offers a range of clean and overdriven tones. Finally, the **Seymour Duncan PowerStage 170** (**£345**) provides efficient clean performance in a titchy package

ALVAREZ **AD60**

The award-winning Alvarez AD60 looks to offer a bold voice in an affordable package. **JAMES STEVENS** investigates...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Alvarez might not be as well known or widely available as other brands in the acoustic sector, but for over 50 years now the US-based company has been producing guitars that have proved reliable, affordable and well made. In doing so, Alvarez have been seen in the hands of a wide range of artists including Ani Di Franco, Monte Montgomery, Thom Yorke, and a certain Joe Bonamassa. Now, handled in the UK by Blackstar Amplification's Dist-X distribution arm, Alvarez's profile and appeal on these shores is growing.

The AD60 is part of Alvarez's entry-level Artist series although, based on first impressions, the AD60 looks anything but budget. Boasting sleek, simple lines and 'less-is-more' decoration, the AD60 is an uncomplicated dread. Alvarez's plan here appears to be to place emphasis on quality materials and construction techniques rather than unnecessary bling.

In terms of its dimensions, the AD60 is every inch a full-bodied dreadnought. Side by side with a Martin D-18, the AD60 is identical, but from having a deeper body by two millimetres.

The AD60 is constructed with a solid, supplier-graded, A+ Sitka spruce book-matched top that possesses a near ruler-straight, well-defined grain. Both the top and back of the guitar has been bound with an ivory-coloured, aged-effect binding that is augmented with a double-tracked, black pinstripe (top only). The same material binds either side of the rosewood fretboard and also serves as the heel cap. The AD60's back and sides are a mahogany laminate with the back again being book-matched.

Alvarez's aim is squeeze every last drop of tonal performance out of the tonewoods employed

Mahogany is also used for the two-piece, low-profile 'C'-shaped neck. Atop the soundboard is a scoop-shaped black coloured pickguard, a dual-ring soundhole rosette – one of which is pearloid – and the distinctive Alvarez bridge which is 'bi-level'. This type of bridge design is sometimes referred to as stepped, and the section of the bridge that accommodates the bridge pins is scooped-out and set four or five millimetres lower than where the bone saddle sits. This results in a greater string break angle. Much has been written about the impact the angle at which strings pass over the saddle has on a guitar's output and performance, so it's good to see Alvarez tick this box on what is an inexpensive guitar. It gives further evidence of the company's desire to produce guitars that squeeze every last drop of tonal performance out of the tonewoods employed.

It's also good to see that Alvarez has given thought to the AD60's bracing pattern, which is referred to as FST2. The omnipresent X-brace design has been forward-shifted, pushing the axis of the X closer to the soundhole. The concept behind the design is to increase the area of the soundboard that is behind the bracing, thereby freeing that area to move more freely; more movement – more volume and response. Also,

KEY FEATURES

Alvarez AD60

- **PRICE** £299
- **DESCRIPTION** Solid-topped dreadnought. Made in China
- **BUILD** A-grade Sitka spruce Dreadnought with laminated mahogany back and sides, semi-gloss finish, and rosewood fingerboard and bridge. Die-cast tuners, and bone nut and saddle
- **HARDWARE** Premium chrome-coloured enclosed tuners
- **ELECTRICS** None
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 45mm at nut, 55mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23mm at 1st fret, 37mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 40mm at nut, 55m at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.05kg/4.40lbs
- **FINISH** 50:50 semi-gloss
- **OPTIONS** Available as a cutaway electro (AD60CD) fitted with a LR Baggs StagePro pickup £399
- **CONTACT** Dist-X Distribution 01604 817817 **alvarezguitars.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Tanglewood TW11 DOL** (**£299**) is a solid-top, full body dreadnought with olive wood back and sides. The **Takamine GD20-NS** (**£299**) offers satin-finished laminate mahogany back and sides but with a solid cedar top. The **Sigma DR-1** (**£299**) has a solid Sitka spruce top, mahogany laminate back and sides, and an Indian rosewood 'board

both the X braces and asymmetric tone bars are scalloped which, again, serves to give the guitar's top more room to 'breathe' and vibrate. Neither forward-shifting nor scalloped bracing were Alvarez's concept initially, but the inclusion here of construction techniques usually reserved for higher priced guitars again speaks volumes about the company's emphasis on tone.

Moving to the top end of the guitar, we find a bone nut, and unbranded, enclosed, chrome-coloured tuners that, although not the smoothest on the market, are certainly sufficiently stable and robust for purpose.

The AD60 is presented with a gloss top, and a semi-gloss finish on the back, sides and neck that makes for a very 'earthy' feeling guitar. There are a couple of small areas – mostly around the waist – where the finish is not as smooth as it might be, but overall the finish is good and makes for speedy and comfortable navigation around the neck.

Overall, the AD60 gives evidence of excellent standards of build standards and quality control. The 21 medium frets are beautifully finished, while the body and neck binding is clean and tidy. The marriage of design and craftsmanship on show here is perhaps best exemplified by the curved fretboard end, which follows the circle of the soundhole. The cut is spot on and as smooth as you like. Top marks to Alvarez for producing such a well-built, good looking guitar.

In Use

Justifiably impressed with the presentation and build of the AD60, we're keen to grab a pick and start putting it through its paces – good looking guitars call-out to be played.

Playing the AD60 while seated, the guitar is no more cumbersome than any other regular dreadnought you've played. However, using a strap (thanks Alvarez for fitting two buttons!), the extra couple of millimetres of depth is noticeable and the AD60 feels a smidgen bulky.

With a medium pick in hand we strum some first position chords and are impressed with the bold, punchy tone. The AD60's output is full, round and unflinching. Chords carry good projection right the way up the neck, and we like the overall balance which is as good as you'll find on any dreadnought at this price point.

Switching to some choppy riff work, the AD60 again proves itself to be more than capable. While the overall tone has plenty of mids, it doesn't get anywhere near brash or metallic. In fact, play softly and the guitar purrs with a smooth timbre well-suited to ballads. Aided by the super-fast neck profile, single-note and solo duties are a breeze and, when played alongside another similarly priced dreadnought, the AD60 is able to cut through without any problems. We even dabble with some fingerstyle playing and, again, can't help but be impressed with how balanced, open and rounded the overall tone is. If truth be told, after an hour or so of playing, we have to remind ourselves of the guitar's price point. So good is the AD60's performance, we'd suggest it would still represent good value for money at twice the price. Alvarez has produced a guitar that further proves the point that, if build quality and tonewood selection is good enough, customers need not be put off by the fact that a guitar isn't all solid. High quality laminate back and side guitars can be pleasing and rewarding while being friendly to our wallets.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Excellent standard of build quality
+ Clean, simple and elegantly uncomplicated looks
+ Fantastic tone and dynamic performance

– A supplied gigbag would have been a nice addition

The AD60 is an extremely capable dreadnought, suitable for a wide range of musical styles, and is outstanding value for money – go try one today, you won't be disappointed

9/10

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ART & LUTHERIE
LEGACY TENNESSEE RED

Combining believable vintage looks with modern production techniques, this mid-sized acoustic offers the best of both worlds. **JAMES STEVENS** investigates...

The seemingly unending stream of new mid-priced acoustics is something of a double-edged sword. The crowded and competitive sector gives us consumers plenty of choice, and in theory we should be able to demand more tonal-bang for our buck. But, on the flip side, the sheer volume of product on offer can sometimes feel bewildering. Part of the challenged faced by today's manufacturers is not just producing great-sounding guitars with high standards of build, but ones that are able to stand out from the crowd.

Credit then to Art & Lutherie, whose current line-up of acoustics and electros are both tonally capable while undeniably eye-catching. Back in our November issue we looked at the Roadhouse – a parlour sized acoustic – and very impressed with it we were, too. The stablemate on the bench here is the larger, Concert Hall-sized Legacy model. Different manufacturers use varying terms to denote this type of body size but, in truth, the legacy is basically the same dimensions as a Martin OM (Orchestral Model). Seen by some as the optimum size for handling both strumming and fingerpicking duties, the Concert Hall is one of the most comfortable body sizes to play.

First impressions out of the box are that the Legacy is an attractive and rather striking guitar. There's an obvious vintage character, but in some ways it feels very modern, too. The lines are sleek and sharp, and although the guitar harks back to the 1930s, it's not old or tired looking. This blend of old and new is an intriguing mix, and one that just makes you want to pick it up and start playing.

> Whether you're really digging in or gently brushing the string, the guitar responds admirably

The cherry-coloured stain is thick enough to provide a rosy hue, but sufficiently thin to allow the grain of the solid Spruce top to be visible. The off-white binding, bridge pins and tuner buttons augment the stain, while the matching 'Americana' pearloid pickguard is the cherry on the vintage-vibed cake. The spruce top has been well book-matched, but the grain isn't as ruler-straight as you can find on some similarly priced guitars. Art & Lutherie points out, however, that all the tops used on its guitars have been pressure tested, ensuring that this crucial part of the guitar's look and performance is sufficiently rigid and stiff.

Inside we were happy to find quarter-sawn Adirondack spruce has been used for the scalloped bracing. Adirondack is known as turbo-charged spruce and its inclusion here – on what is a relatively inexpensive guitar – is a real plus point.

The Legacy's back and sides is a wild cherry laminate. Sonically, cherry lands on the tonal spectrum between mahogany and rosewood. It's a very balanced, almost neutral tonewood in that it doesn't favour either the bass or the treble frequencies. Wild cherry can also produce some vibrant grain patterns as is the case with our review model. The thin, semi-gloss finish not only gives the guitar an authentic aged feel, but is also shows off the textures of the tonewoods in use here.

Elsewhere, the fingerboard and bridge are formed from rosewood, the nut and saddle are Graph Tech

KEY FEATURES

Art & Lutherie Legacy Tennessee Red

- **PRICE** £399
- **DESCRIPTION** Concert Hall-sized acoustic. Made in Canada
- **BUILD** Solid Spruce top, Wild Cherry 3-layer laminate back and sides, Silver Leaf Maple neck, 14-fret neck join, Rosewood fingerboard and bridge. 95% Canadian wood.
- **HARDWARE** Open-gear 18:1 antique brass tuning machines with off-white buttons
- **ELECTRICS** None
- **SCALE LENGTH** 24.84"/630mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 54mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23mm at 1st fret, 27mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37mm at nut, 55mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 1.97kg/4.34lbs
- **FINISH** Semi-gloss Tennessee Red
- **OPTIONS** Available in Faded Black and Bourbon Burst, and as an electro with Godin Q1T built-in electronics (£499)
- **CONTACT** 440 Distribution 0113 4433145 **www.godinguitars.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Freshman FOP10TSB** (**£399**) is a Sitka spruce/mahogany 000-sized solid topped acoustic finished in tobacco sunburst. The **Fender CC-140SE** (**£399**) is a spruce/rosewood Concert-sized cutaway, finished in tobacco sunburst and comes with a Fishman Presys pickup system and hardshell case. The **Tanglewood TW60 SC VS E** (**£599**) is a spruce/mahogany Auditorium fitted with Fishman Presys+ with a vintage sunburst finish

Tusq, and the Silver Leaf Maple neck accommodates a double-action truss rod and 21 medium sized frets.

The neck has a low 'C' profile and whizzing up and down the fretboard is a breeze. The headstock is home to open-geared, authentic brass tuners with sympathetic off-white buttons. Close inspection of the rear of the headstock gives evidence of a fairly uncommon production technique. Every Art & Lutherie neck starts life as a cut, one-piece chunk of wood, but the headstock is sliced off at a 45-degree angle, spun round and then glued back on with the grain reversed. Far from weakening the structure of the guitar, Art & Lutherie states that this process actually strengthens the neck.

The overall build quality of the Legacy is very good. All joints are clean and tight, and fixtures and fittings feel sturdy and robust. Inspection inside the guitar's body did reveal a few lapses in quality control; a couple of blobs of excess glue around the kerfling, along with some wood tiny scraps of wood shavings. It's nothing terminal, but it is a shame because externally the guitar is very well presented.

In Use

As reported in our November issue, the Legacy's younger brother, the parlour Roadhouse, had a mid-range tonality that, although perfect for bluesy fingerstyle, lacked a little versatility. The Legacy definitely has a more expressive, versatile tonality to it, but the two guitars are very much cut from the same cloth. The larger body size offers more projection and volume than the Roadhouse, but essentially the timbre is very dry and woody which, as you'd expect, makes this guitar perfect for bluesy-style fingerpicking.

Breaking it down, the high end register has a zingy 'snap' which helps single note runs cut through when played with another acoustic. The mids are more rounded and a smidgen warmer than expected, while the low end is present enough to handle fingerstyle disciplines, but understandably lacks the richness offered by a rosewood (or similar) back and sides – which actually means this guitar should record well.

With a medium pick in hand, we gave the Legacy a 'hearty strum' and were impressed with the clarity and headroom offered by the Concert Hall sized body. Also notable is how well it handles varying degrees of attack when playing solos. Whether you're really 'digging in' or gently brushing the string, the guitar responds admirably to the variation in dynamics.

Overall, the Legacy sounds the way it looks; the vintage styling and vibe are matched by the woody midrange which was a lot of fun. The Legacy is also available as a cutaway electro loaded with a Godin Q1T pickup (£499), which is certainly worth a look if you want a Legacy model to take on stage.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Fantastic vintage style in both looks and tonality
+ Great value for money
+ Sleek neck makes for easy and comfortable playing

- A couple of very minor lapses in quality control
- It would have been nice to see a gigbag included

The Legacy is a great-looking, comfortable to play guitar that's perfect for blues or ragtime, and represents excellent value for money

8/10

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Fender Classic Player Jaguar Special HH
Finished in Olympic White. New Hotter Pickups with fatter tone. Multiple improvements. With Fender Gig Bag.

Gretsch G6120-59LTV QM LTD
The '59 Gretsch 6120 Chet Atkins. Featuring trestle bracing, dual TV Jones® Classic humbucking pickups. With Hard Case.

Fender FSR Classic 69 Telecaster
Pink Paisley. Made in Japan. Fender Special Run. Slim C Neck. Vintage Style Single Coil Pickups. Classic Finish!

PRS SE Fredrik Akesson
Signature Model. 22 Fret wide fat neck. 24.5" scale length. Bird inlays. TonePros stoptail bridge. With Padded Bag.

The Heritage H150CM
Made in Gibson's old Kalamazoo Factory in 2001. Featuring Seymour Duncan '59 Humbuckers. Perfect Condition. Hard Case.

Sandberg California VS
4 String Bass. Finished in Sunburst. 6 Bolted Hardrock maple Neck. Split coil output pickups. Fantastic quality.

Rickenbacker 360/12 Mapleglo
Deluxe Hollow Body with a special contoured body. Rosewood Fingerboard with Triangular Inlays. Made in USA. With Hard Case.

Rickenbacker 620/6 Mapleglo
Deluxe Hollow Body with a special contoured body. Rosewood Fingerboard with Triangular Inlays. Made in USA. With Hard Case.

Suhr Classic T Pro
John Suhr designed guitar. Fantastic condition. Featuring Lola Neck Pickup. Alder Body. Rosewood Fretboard. With Hard Case.

HOUSE OF TONE
TRU PAF HUMBUCKERS

The quest for the perfect PAF copy seems never-ending. **HUW PRICE** tests a set that might just make you call off the search...

Most pickup makers dive straight into PAF replicas but House Of Tone took its time – for reasons discussed in our interview with Matthew Bascetta on p108. Suffice to say, these Tru PAFs are the unpotted PAF humbucker replicas we have been waiting for from one of the UK's most talented and knowledgeable winders.

The units are made entirely from vintage-correct parts and for a small upcharge, relic'd sets with 'Patent Applied For' stickers are available to order. Wax potting and four-conductor wire are also available.

Shortly before handing this set over to *TGM* for review, Bascetta installed them in a Gibson Custom Collector's Choice #15 'Greg Martin' Les Paul for the Kentucky Headhunters mainman himself. Having tried the new pickups, Martin declared that the borrowed instrument sounds better than his personal Collector's Choice guitar. For our test, we brought in another Collector's Choice #15 to see how the House Of Tone Tru PAFs stack up.

In Use

As a result of much previous A/B testing with vintage examples, Monty's PAFs serve as our reference replicas of Gibson golden era 'buckers. Like the Monty's, the Tru PAFs share all of the characteristics of a great set of originals, but there are differences. Where Monty's offer a lower mid growl, the HOTs have more bite in the upper-mid 'loudness' frequencies. First impressions indicate that these are rock voiced PAFs with slightly more aggression and authority to cut through the mix.

Everything that appeals about PAFs, such as finger noise, note bloom, versatility and controllability is here. We that find the bass end of the neck pickup can get a little woolly, but the bridge has no such issues. The soft bass may be down to the difficulty our cathode biased, tube-rectified test amp has dealing with overdrive and such deep lows. It's not displeasing, and with a tighter amp it may be unnoticeable.

The Monty's are more microphonic than the HOT units and have a more even frequency response, whereas the Tru PAFs give more emphasis to highs and lows. With the HOTs, the experience is less like playing a microphone with six strings, so it's less 'acoustically live'. However, clean-up is equally impressive because the extended treble ensures that chime is always retained.

The HOTs give notes an extremely articulate and defined front-end, while the Monty's are more rounded and forgiving. If you play fast and have precise technique, the HOTs will track your picking superbly.

Swapping from Monty's to the Tru PAFs is like Peter Green handing his Burst over to Gary Moore. It may have been the same guitar, but it never sounded the same again. Even pedal-free, the extra push from the bridge pickup does a lot of the work for you because of its fluid sustain. As a vintage PAF interpretation, the HOTs may make for an easier introduction for fans of hotter humbuckers.

Although the House Of Tone Tru PAFs are not quite as harmonically complex or pretty as the Monty's, you may find them more exciting and raucous. If you're chasing Southern Rock, ZZ Top, Zeppelin and early GN'R tones, Bascetta's Tru PAFs are damn near perfect.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Other highly-rated vintage PAF clones include **Monty's PAFs** (**£216**), **Tyson Preachers** (**$325**), **Echopark The 1958 A Humbuckers** (**$350**) and **Throbak KZ-115s** (**$549**)

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Replicates PAF tone and dynamics
+ Wide frequency range and extremely articulate
+ Slightly rockier edge than some
+ Very competitively priced

– For this price, nothing

The Tru PAFs can be added to the still short list of PAF replicas that genuinely sound like the real deal

10/10

The Guitar Magazine AWARD EXCELLENCE 10/10

KEY FEATURES

House Of Tone Tru PAF Humbuckers

- **PRICE** £200 (set, covered) £180 (set, uncovered)
- **DESCRIPTION** Hand wound vintage PAF style humbucking pickups. Made in the UK
- **BUILD** 42 AWG plain enamel magnet wire, alnico II & V magnets, unpotted coils, butyrate bobbins, low carbon steel parts, nickel silver covers
- **DC RESISTANCE** Bridge 7.2k, neck 7.4k (as reviewed – production versions will feature bridge units wound to around 7.7k)
- **CONTACT** House Of Tone Pickups 07791 691251 **www.houseoftonepickups.com**

The House Of Tone team: (l-r) Luke Gardner, Matthew Bascetta and Nick Leech

Talking Shop

HOUSE PARTY

We visit House Of Tone's Chester workshop to talk PAFs, and see how the magic happens...

After cutting his teeth building high-end acoustics and taking on maintenance and repair work, Matthew Bascetta moved into the world of hand-made pickups several years ago. Heading up a small team based in the picturesque walled city of Chester in the north of England, Bascetta has developed a range of vintage and modern-voiced guitar and bass pickups that will be familiar to regular readers of *The Guitar Magazine*.

Given that PAF-style humbuckers are such a staple of the aftermarket pickup industry why has it taken Matt until now to release his take on this fabled theme?

"It has been a couple of years, partly because I thought the market was a little saturated. It also came from not having all the parts to make everything as accurate as it needed to be.

"Claiming to have a good PAF rings massive bells with certain people, many of whom are unforgiving. They know what a PAF should do, and if it doesn't, they'll say it's rubbish. So, I wasn't going to put my neck on the block until I could get all the parts I needed to do it properly.

"But people were asking me for PAFs, and that piqued my interest because it meant there was still room in the market. I started getting serious about parts-sourcing and once everything was in place, we spent about six months experimenting and getting prototypes out to people."

Q Can we assume you use all the classic PAF parts?

"The key is that the keeper bar, slugs and pole pieces should have lower carbon content than standard modern parts. That makes a big difference. The maple spacers and butyrate bobbins are a nice touch for vintage accuracy, but if you want your PAF to sound like a real PAF, the low-carbon steel parts are much more important. It has an effect on the flux field and therefore the inductance of the pickup. Of course, we use nickel silver covers and plain enamel magnet wire, too.

"A lot of this isn't exactly rocket science but more about attention to detail. The information has been out there for years, but it's how you work with that information and how much you want to get down to the nitty gritty. The market makes it clear that the more detail, the better, and that applies to sound and looks. You want to give customers what they expect.

"With wax potting, I tell customers there are circumstances where you've got to have it. If they do need it I'll start slowly with a light potting and if they're still having squeal problems, we'll pot them again. But in general, I tell people if you want a PAF to sound like a PAF, unpotted coils are a big part of why they sound like they do."

During our visit, the House Of Tone guys showed us how they wind a vintage Strat-style single coil

The winding machine where the House Of Tone magic happens

Matthew puts his Tru PAF prototypes to the test

Every House Of Tone pickup arrives in a lovely wooden presentation box

Q Some renowned PAF makers gravitate towards alnico IV magnets but you don't...

"There is a little bit of variation when we weaken the alnico V magnets, but I prefer to use de-gaussed V rather than IV. Originally alnico IV was essentially B-grade V, but nowadays it has become a standardised thing among magnet makers and it gives a very flat EQ. It can be good for certain applications, but for my taste it's not great for vintage tones.

"In our PAF replicas, the bridge has an alnico II magnet because I love what that does to the top end. It takes a bit of edge off but it's still really chimey and bell-like. It gives me what I think a PAF is supposed to do, which is that P-90 kind of sound.

"I don't like it in the neck though because it's too easy for it to go woolly, so I use V in the neck to give better articulation to the treble and less of a compressed sound. I find that's a really nice mix to get the quintessential sounds of the two positions while minimising the potentially negative aspects like an ice pick bridge and muddy neck."

"A lot of this isn't exactly rocket science but more about attention to detail. The more detail the better, and that applies to sound and looks"

Q We also noticed that your PAFs have no shortage of bass and treble

"Some call it a mid-scoop but that's a bit of a misnomer, because it's actually about accentuating the bass and treble frequencies. You can do it a little bit through altering your wind pattern, but alnico V will also help with that. Alnico II doesn't really help or hinder, alnico IV is very even and alnico III has a lot more midrange presence to it."

Q Are aged versions available?

"We're happy to do that using a mixture of different methods. We can also offer 'Patent Applied For' stickers, but there is a little bit of a charge on top because the ones we use are vintage-correct and are harder to get. One thing that puts me off personally is that it feels a little like putting a manufacturer's decal on a kit guitar. Being in the trade I think that's ethically a little wrong and putting those decals on the pickups feels a bit like that because we're not trying to pass anything off. We're merely trying to recreate a tone."

Visit www.houseoftonepickups.com for more

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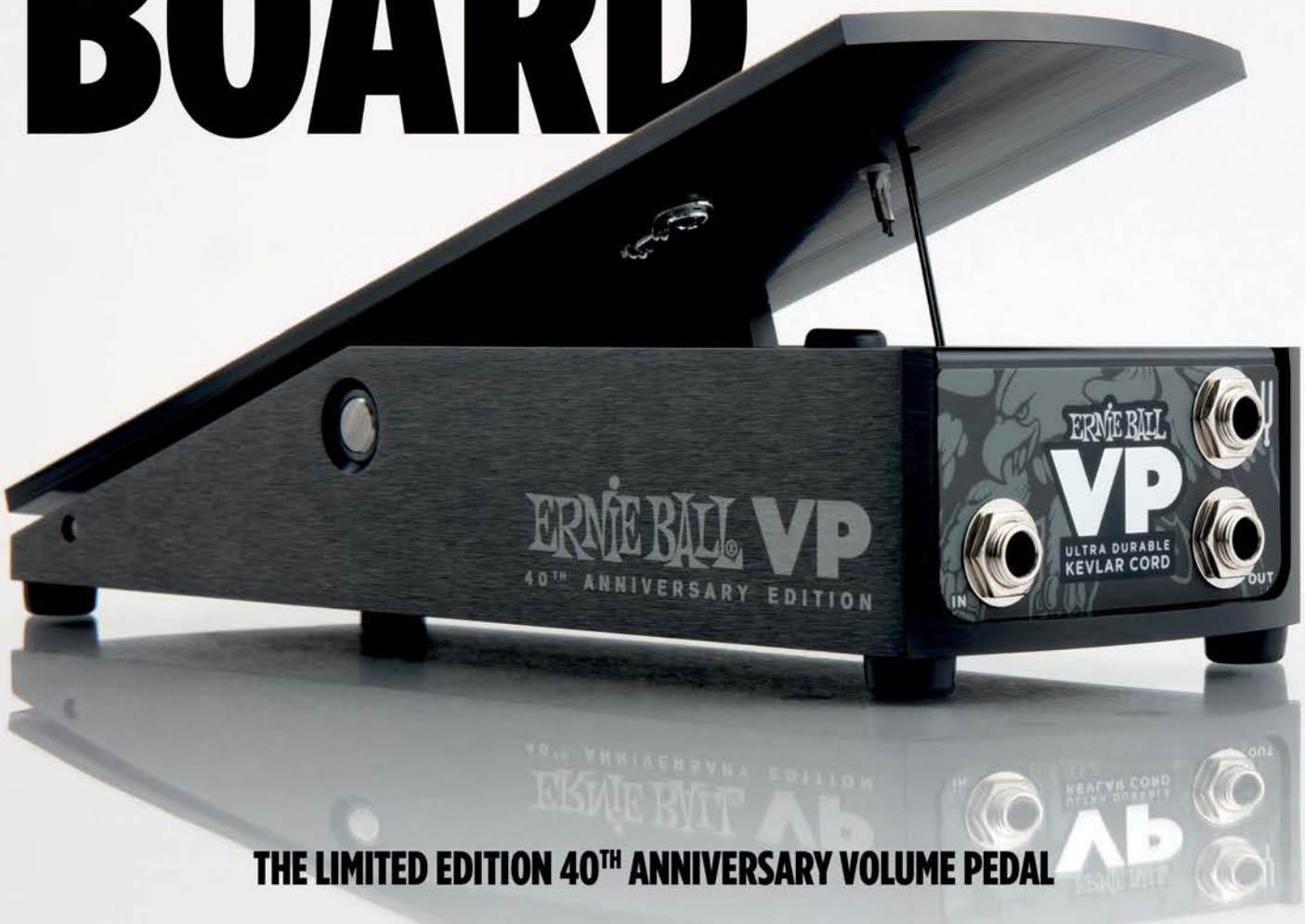

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DIY WORKSHOP

GOLDTOP CONVERSION

PART FOUR

Our Greco conversion project continues with work to be done on the neck and body. **HUW PRICE** discovers that luthiery sometimes sucks...

1 The first frets go in with a little persuasion from a B&Q nylon-headed mallet

2 Before seating, the frets are wiped with isopropyl alcohol to remove oil from the surface

With fretting, binding and body veneering all needing to be done in this instalment of our conversion of an old Greco single-cut electric into a 50s-style Goldtop, we've got an awful lot to get through! With that in mind, let's dispense with the preamble and get straight into it...

'Board Off

I've two reasons for removing the fingerboard. I have always planned to veneer the top of the body to ensure that the plugged post holes and humbucker plugs never show through the paintwork. Otherwise, these modifications will eventually reveal themselves once the lacquer has cured and starts to shrink back. Applying a veneer over the guitar's top is one way to ensure that this never happens.

Although it is possible to veneer around the fingerboard, things could get messy and had the original binding survived the paint stripping process, I'd be left with the problem of transitioning from the veneer level to the binding level to reveal it. That's something I'm not even prepared to contemplate.

I've always planned to veneer the top to ensure that the plugged post holes and humbucker plugs never show

My main motivation however, is to increase the neck depth. The neck on this Greco is too skinny for my taste and a fair bit slimmer than the 1954 Goldtop we measured for reference. Using a micrometer, I measure 20.95mm, 22.64mm and 25.42mm at the 1st, 7th and 12th frets respectively. Compare this with the 54's measurements of 23.06mm, 23.97mm and 25.92mm, and it just won't do.

The 12th fret reading is actually a bit misleading, because it merely indicates that the heel carve shapes are a bit different –

this is why we provide a 9th fret depth reading instead when we review acoustic guitars. Based on the first and seventh fret measurements, I'm looking for an extra 1.5mm or so.

Regular readers may recall how I back veneered my Gretsch Anniversary conversion fingerboard when I was building my 6120 conversion. Then it was more about restoring the fingerboard depth having removed so much material when sanding through all the dents and divots.

I won't dwell on the process of 'board removal, back veneering and edge trimming here because you can read about it on theguitarmagazine.com in parts two and three of our Gretsch Workshop. Suffice to say, the process here is the same, however it takes a little longer when modern glues have been used rather than hot hide glue.

Fret Hot

I have to make a decision about the frets. Although the original fretwire on the guitar is only about 50 per cent worn and perfectly serviceable, the frets do need levelling and crowning. I also fancy fret nibs, and it seems crazy to do so when the guitar may need re-fretting in just a few years.

So, it's re-fret time but that means I have to make another decision – do I go with early or late 50s-style wire? Most Gibson players seem to prefer the latter, with its wider crowns measuring around 0.1 inches. However, a mid-1950s Goldtop would have left the factory with skinnier wire measuring around 0.07 inches wide. Having spent my formative years playing Fenders, I'm quite partial to the slim stuff, so early 50s wire wins out.

Firstly, I have to take out the Greco frets, and although I might once have prized them out with chisel blades, I can only stress how much quicker, safer and easier this process is with a £20 bespoke fret removal tool. The frets aren't glued in, and they all come out fairly cleanly.

Chips in the rosewood are inevitable, so I suggest pressing them back down with a craft knife blade and wicking in some superglue before moving on to the next fret. The Greco 'board is actually in pretty decent shape, so I settle for a light sanding with 320 grit abrasive paper taped to a 12-inch radius block. I sand until the marks from the original frets and any superglue repairs have disappeared.

Throughout this process, the 'board is fixed to a flat surface with double-sided tape. Try applying masking tape to the underside of the board and the flat surface before applying the double-sided tape because it makes detaching the fingerboard easier and less risky when you're done with the installation.

Before fretting, I run a veneer blade saw through the fret slots to loosen all the rosewood dust compacted inside, then I pass a vacuum cleaner hose across the top. Once all the dust is removed, I wipe the board thoroughly with white spirit and leave it to dry off.

3 After trimming with flush cut nippers, the fret ends are ground flush with the fingerboard

4 Superglue grabs fast, but we tape the binding and hold it tight in a workbench vice for several minutes

5 The first fret nib is done... only 43 left to do!

6 The veneer is cut out to clear the neck tenon and the flimsy pieces are strengthened with binding tape

We've also covered fretting in Workshop before, so I won't dwell on it here. I pre-bend them with a home-made fret bender and then tap them in with a nylon head mallet from B&Q. The nylon is hard enough to drive the frets in, but softer than the metal so it doesn't leave marks in the fretwire.

His Nibs

I shied away from doing fret nibs when I restored the Gretsch, partly because the narrow fingerboard made me prioritise usable playing area rather than vintage-correct cosmetics. The Greco 'board is wider, so that's not really an issue, and I fancy having a go for the first time.

With all the frets seated, I use Crimson Guitars fret nippers to cut them flush with the board and follow up with my fret edge file set at a right angle. The idea is to get the frets completely flush to the board edge so the fingerboard binding can adhere to a flat surface. Water thin superglue is then applied to ends of all the fret slots and allowed to wick in before any excess is wiped and sanded off.

There's no great secret to fingerboard binding. You hold the board upright in a vice or mini workbench, run thick superglue along the edge of the board and fret ends, then carefully place the pre-cut binding over the board and tape it down. Don't be tempted to try lining the binding up along the underside edge because the superglue grabs fast. Instead aim for an overhang on both sides.

First, I scrape and sand the underside of the board to bring the biding level with the wood. I would advise using a scraper or Stanley knife blade to remove most of the excess binding before following up with a decent sanding block. This ensures the binding and underside of the board are perfectly level and will minimise the chances of gaps showing once the board is glued back onto the neck.

Having always imagined creating binding nibs to be an onerous task, I find myself enjoying it immensely

Having always imagined creating binding nibs to be an onerous task, I find myself enjoying it immensely. Some people use flush trimming router bits to do the donkey work but I go old school and do the whole job with a file and a scraper blade.

I start by filing a notch all the way down to the board on each on side of a fret, leaving a millimetre or so of clearance, and then twist the file upright so the non-cutting edge is against the board so I can work my way up to the fret. The file quickly removes the excess binding between fret notches and I true up the surface of the board and binding with the scraper. The entire job takes little more than an hour, but I'll wait until the board is glued back on before bevelling the edges.

In The Bag

Watching my mate Patrick Alexander apply veneer to the front plate of my Gretsch 6120 conversion was mind-blowing and this Greco needs the same treatment. Rather than trouble Patrick again, I start researching bag presses and air compressors, only to discover that getting kitted up will cost around £350.

Then, one evening I find myself watching TV in a Paris hotel room and an advert appears for vacuum storage bags. You can put towels and bedding in the bag and then suck out all the air with a vacuum cleaner to reduce bulk.

Back home I discover I can buy something similar at Dunelm and two 100cm by 80cm bags cost me £6. With a piece of scrap veneer on the top of the guitar, I place it in the bag, suck out the air and voila – it works! I leave it overnight and in the morning, it's still working.

With some maple veneer from Dave Dyke Luthier Supplies that's sufficiently wide to cover the front of the body with a single piece, I place the body over the veneer. With a pencil held flat against the side of the guitar's body, I trace the body outline onto the veneer, which ensures the veneer will be slightly oversized all around. This leaves some margin for error and also allows for the edges to be pulled inwards as the veneer conforms to the carved top.

Typically, veneer will have some splits in it, so they must be securely taped together before gluing it to the body. I use Rothko & Frost binding tape because it sticks well and doesn't stretch. With a sharp craft knife I cut around the body line and place the veneer over the body. I then tape it in position with masking tape and cut out an opening so that no veneer will end up glued to the neck tenon. The delicate edges, where the veneer may split along the grain line, are reinforced with masking tape at

5

6

7 With a little heat and patience, the body binding comes off quickly and cleanly

8 Titebond Cold Press veneer glue is applied liberally across the top to be spread evenly with a paint brush

9 Loosely held in position with masking tape, the guitar is placed in a vacuum bag and the air inside is sucked out

the cutaway horn, the upper bout and both lower bouts.

The Greco tenon sits proud of the body and the factory glued mahogany wedges onto the body each side of the tenon to close up the gaps that would have been visible under the fingerboard. I carefully chisel off the wedges and any remaining glue because the 0.6mm veneer has sufficient thickness to perform the same function. I also remove the body binding by heating it with a hairdryer and coaxing it off with a craft knife.

After carefully removing all dust and detritus from the body, I apply Titebond Cold Press veneer glue to the body and spread it evenly with an old paintbrush. It's essential to ensure that every millimetre of the surface is covered and glue thickness is as even as possible.

Working quickly, I place the veneer over the body, tape it in position with loosely applied pieces of masking tape and put it inside the vacuum bag. Half the air is sucked out and the veneer conforms to the top curve. At this point I pause and apply a roller to the veneer, working from the body centre to the outside edges.

This ensures that no air bubbles are trapped between the veneer and the body. Once I feel reasonably confident, I suck any remaining air from the bag, screw the cap onto the valve and walk away. After an anxious two-hour wait, I remove the guitar from the bag and I'm relieved to find it has stuck down well.

I place the veneer over the body, tape it in position with masking tape and put it inside the vacuum bag...

On The Edge

Before doing the body binding, the veneer overhang must be trimmed away. It's often said that bad workmen blame their tools, but I have always found that I get better results when I have really good ones at my disposal.

The Guitar Magazine

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11

Accordingly, I treat myself to a gorgeous Wilhelm Schmitt Kirschen chisel and it makes light work of squaring the veneer to the edge of the binding channel. With all the excess removed, I smooth the edge with a sanding block and it's body binding time.

ABS plastic needs a fair amount of heat to bend, but use too much and you'll melt it. I find hairdryers to be insufficient, but a paint stripper gun works fine – so long as you're careful. I pre-bend all the binding and tape it to the body to cool down before applying the glue.

I use Weld 16 binding adhesive, because it melts the plastic onto the body and has good gap filling ability. I can advise that too much glue is just about enough, things do get messy and it's advisable to get your binding tape pre-cut into suitable lengths and lined up before you start.

After a particularly unenjoyable hour the body is bound, taped up and set aside for a day. I carefully remove all the tape, scrape and sand the binding flush with the top and at last, the body is ready for the neck to be glued back on. But that will have to wait until next time!

10 A sharp chisel makes light work of trimming the veneer flush with the routing channel

11 With binding tape, masking tape and rubber tubing holding it in place, the glued binding is set aside for 24 hours

12 After much filing, scraping and sanding the binding job turns out looking pretty good

NEXT MONTH...

Huw Price tries his hand at body building as he gets back to our DIY Martin acoustic project...

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All About... Potentiometers

Your tone and volume pots can have a significant impact on your sound, but how much do we actually know about what makes those controls work? **HUW PRICE** goes to pot...

There are things in life that affect us all, yet we generally prefer not to think about them. In the wider world, these may include terminal illness, death and Brexit, and in the guitar world we might suggest speakers, straps and potentiometers. Considering that the transformative effect of a five quid pot swap may greatly exceed that of a costly pickup upgrade, that's an oversight.

If you play electric guitar, there will almost always be one or two potentiometers between your pickups and your pedalboard or amp input. Even if you use your volume pot more as an on/off control than for volume adjustment per se, it has a significant impact on tone regardless. On the other hand, if you do like to control an amp using your guitar volume, you may already be aware that not all volume pots are created equal.

A potentiometer can be used in one of two ways – as a voltage divider (fig 1) or as a variable resistor (aka rheostat – fig 2). Potentiometers in guitar circuits are used to control volume and tone. For volume applications, they are configured as voltage dividers and for tone they are wired as variable resistors.

Volume Pots

Look at volume control wiring, and you'll notice how all three connection lugs are used. One of the outer lugs will be connected to the hot wire from a pickup or, in the case of Strat-style master volume set-ups, the output from a pickup selector. The second outer lug is wired directly to ground and the centre lug serves as the pot's output connector.

The outer lugs are connected to one another by a strip that has a fixed resistance. Theoretically the resistance should be stamped on the outside casing of the pot, but the stated resistance and actual resistance rarely correspond. If you want to determine the actual value of a potentiometer – out of circuit – connect the test wires from a multimeter to the pot's outer lugs. Resistance will remain unchanged even as the pot is being turned.

The centre (output) tag is called the 'wiper' and it is connected to a conductor that makes contact

with the resistive strip. Turning the pot changes the position of the wiper on the strip, which effectively divides the resistive strip into two resistors.

When the wiper is set around the half way point, there will be resistance between the wiper and the input and between the wiper and ground. Therefore, some of the input voltage will appear at the pot output while some will go to ground. This is how volume reduction is achieved.

Turn the wiper tag all the way up to the input tag and there will be little or no resistance between the two of them. This is because theoretically the voltage readings on the input and output tags will be identical. As the wiper is moved towards the ground connection, the resistance between the wiper and ground decreases until it reaches zero. As resistance drops, more of the input voltage flows to ground, which lowers volume until, eventually, all of the input voltage goes to ground and none appears at the output.

Not all pots are created equal. Potentiometers in guitar circuits are used to control volume and tone

Tone Pots

The tone control is easier to understand because only two tags are used – the wiper and one of the outer tags. The spare outer tag is left unconnected, and is frequently snipped off entirely.

In Les Pauls, one lead wire from a capacitor is wired to the volume potentiometer's output (or input) and the other wire is soldered to an outer lug on the tone pot with its centre lug connected to ground.

When the wiper is turned all the way around to the input lug, the resistance between them falls to zero and all of the high frequencies that have flowed through the capacitor will go directly to ground. This corresponds to the tone control being rolled fully back.

At the other extreme, the resistance between the input and wiper will roughly coincide with whatever it says on the pot casing. This is equivalent to the tone control being 'unused'. But if you're thinking that some of the high frequencies must still be finding their way to ground if the resistance is only 250k or 500k, you're correct.

This is why there is always some treble bleed whenever tone controls are installed. Some people prefer to use no-load tone pots because they take the tone control completely out of circuit when it's not required and a brighter sound is achieved.

Pot Taper

The relationship between wiper position and resistance between the wiper and input lug determines the 'taper' of the pot. So, if you can read 500k on your multimeter at one extreme, zero resistance at the other and exactly 250k at the half way point, you have established that the pot has a linear taper and you may notice a 'B' prefix along with the pot value.

If the resistance increases slowly, remains lower than 250k at the halfway point, and increases rapidly towards the end of the resistive strip, then the pot has a logarithmic response. This is generally referred to as 'log' or 'audio' taper' and an 'A' prefix is sometimes used to denote this.

A third type is known as 'inverse log' or 'negative log' because resistance increases rapidly and will exceed 250k long before the wiper reaches its centre position. However, the rate of resistance change decreases as it nears maximum. An 'F' prefix is sometimes used for these

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pots, but we are not aware of them being used in guitars.

Let's go back to the linear pot and set at the halfway point. Although the resistance readings between the output lug and the ground and input lugs are identical at 250k, it doesn't actually follow that the volume is halved. The pot may be linear, but the way our ears perceive volume isn't.

For our ears to perceive a halving of volume with the control at the midway point, the pot actually needs to be logarithmic. So, log pots are generally preferred for volume because signal level ramps up, and down more smoothly that it does with linear pots. But not all log pots are the same.

If you prefer a smoother response, go linear. If you want a more dramatic wah-type effect, go log

The most widely used guitar pots are made by CTS, and they offer 'modern' and 'true vintage' taper log pots. The difference is described as follows – "vintage pots are at 30 per cent of their total resistance at five on the dial, whilst a modern pot is at 15 per cent". Similarly, manufacturers such as Bourns, Alpha and Alps may all have their own log response. Ultimately, it's a matter of trying different types to decide what works for you.

The same can be said for tone pots, but things are less clear cut. Some prefer a smoother response, while others want a more dramatic wah-type effect. If you want the former, go linear and if you want the latter, go log.

The Resistance

There are well-established conventions about matching up pots and pickups that go back to the earliest solidbodies, but there's nothing compelling you to stick with them. As a rule, bright single-coil pickups will be used with 250k pots and darker humbuckers with 500k pots.

It's generally assumed that lower resistance pots sound brighter, but it's actually the way that the pot interacts with the resistance, inductance and capacitance of pickups, tone controls that determines the brightness.

With regular passive circuits, there is always some treble roll off, which tends to begin at around 3.5k with humbuckers and 4.5k with single coils. The interesting bit is the resonance peak at the cutoff frequency and the higher the potentiometer resistance value, the greater the amplitude of that peak.

Any sound engineer will tell you, 3k to 5k is a pretty crucial frequency range for guitar tone. It's where you find clarity and the cut that gets you heard through a mix. But if your guitar is loaded with bright pickups, or your amp and speaker have a lot of brightness, that useful cut can turn to harshness and shrillness.

Maximum resonance will be achieved with a one meg volume pot and a no-load tone pot. A pair of 100k pots will produce the flattest frequency response up to the cutoff frequency. Mix and match values to find your ideal tone and feel free to deviate from the usual. Also check the value of the pots in your guitar before changing pickups because countless Les Pauls have been buried in mud by Gibson's decision to use 300k pots.

Buying tips

To close, here are some considerations for pot-swapping. If your control knobs are push-on types, you need a split shaft. Knobs secured by grub screws require solid shafts. Shaft length is important too because long shafts are often needed for carved top guitars such as Les Pauls.

If you enjoy using the controls for rapid adjustments, volume swells and wah effects, find out about the feel. Some pots are looser than others, which is why Yngwie Malmsteen prefers Bourns pots. You can buy them for about £3 at RS Components. And for all the southpaws out there, don't forget to buy left-handed pots!

Fig 1 – Volume Control

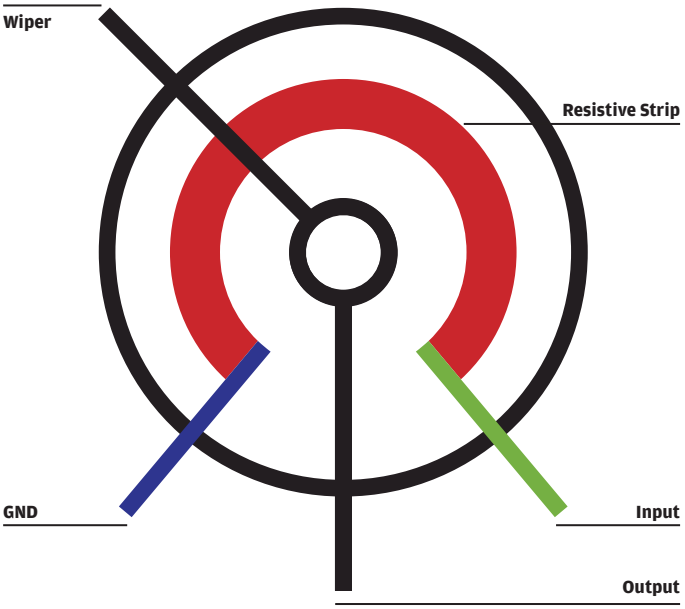
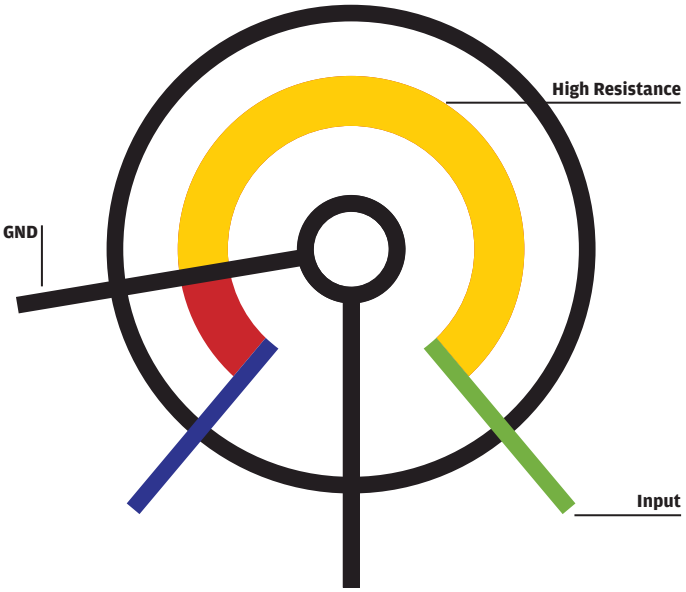


Fig 2a – Tone Control

Fig 2b – Tone Control



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Chord Clinic

Take an ordinary dominant seventh chord and sharpen the fifth and you have a 7♯5 chord. **ROD FOGG** feels the intensity...

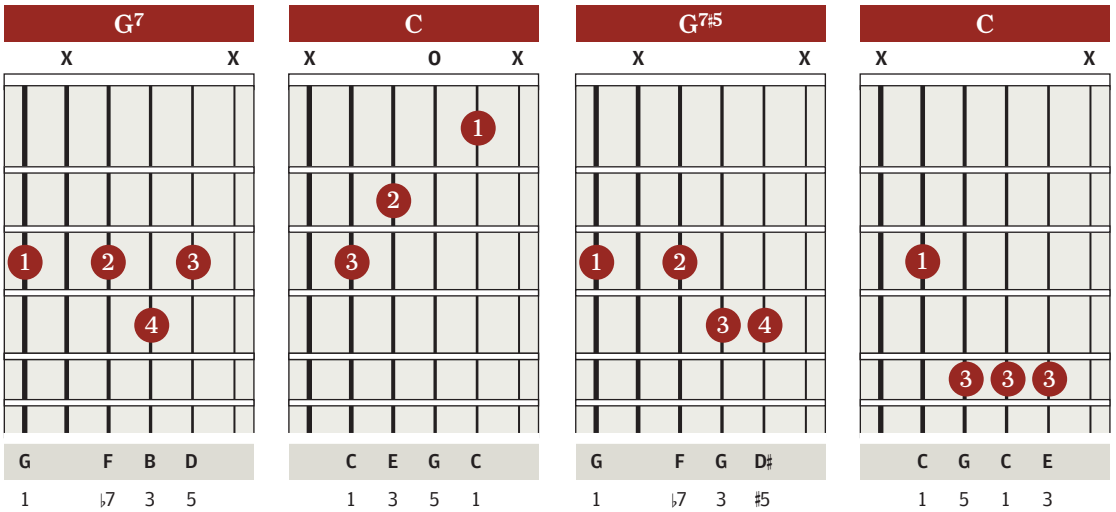
The seven sharp five chord (7♯5) can be found in early jazz, ragtime music and gospel and in contemporary styles of music that these have influenced. Used sparingly, it can also add intensity to a blues chord sequence and even occasionally crops up in pop and rock. Figure 1 illustrates what a sharp five chord can do, with a plain G7 chord resolving to C major, followed by G7♯5 chord resolving to a different C major shape or optionally to C major seven. Comparing G7 to G7♯5 allows you to hear the added intensity the sharp five brings to the chord. In G7♯5 both the third and the sharp five want to resolve upwards to C major; the third (B) rises to C and the sharp five (D♯) rises to E – this is the source of that additional intensity when compared to G7. Be careful to mute the unwanted notes with your fret-hand fingers when playing these chords.

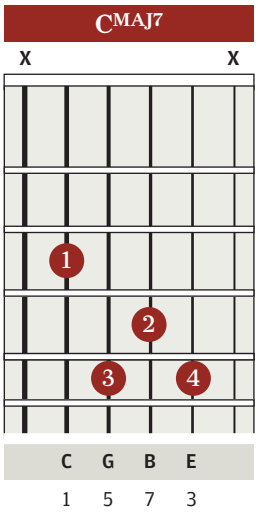
Figure 2 is a retake of figure 1 but with the root of the dominant chord on the A string. This time we are comparing C7 moving to F with C7♯5 moving to F or Fmaj7. As we become familiar with these chords we can get the sound of them in our heads and may find we can occasionally drop them into a chord sequence. Next time you're playing a blues in C make the final chord of the turnaround G7♯5 instead of G7 and you might get some interested raised eyebrows.

Voicing Concerns

Chord voicings on the guitar often omit one or more of the less important notes in a chord. The fifth is often left out, but that's not really an option with a 7♯5 chord, so you can expect entirely four-note voicings. However, the context may allow you to leave out the root note. Try it with the shapes above – it works surprisingly well. For this month's theory moment let's just say that what we're looking

Figure 1





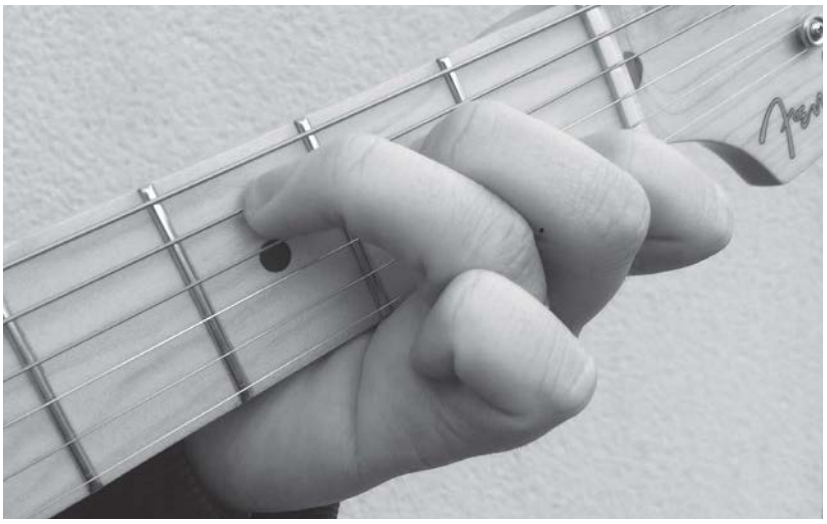


Figure 2

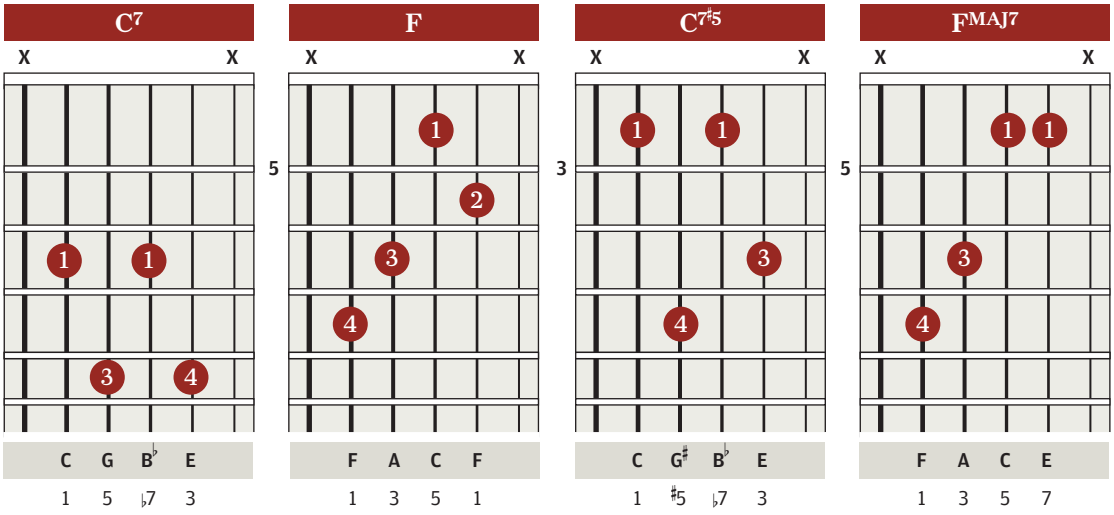
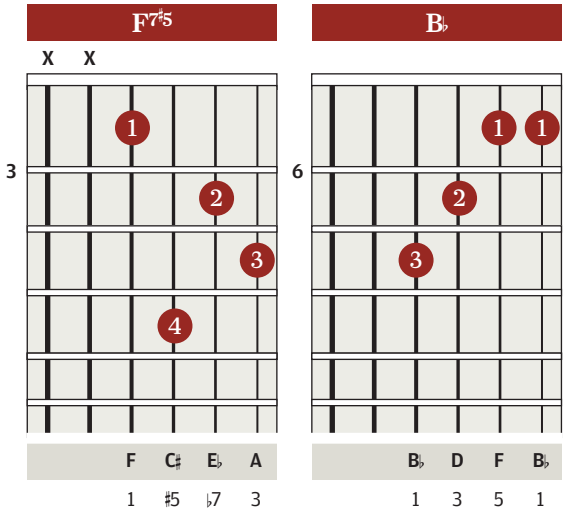


Figure 3

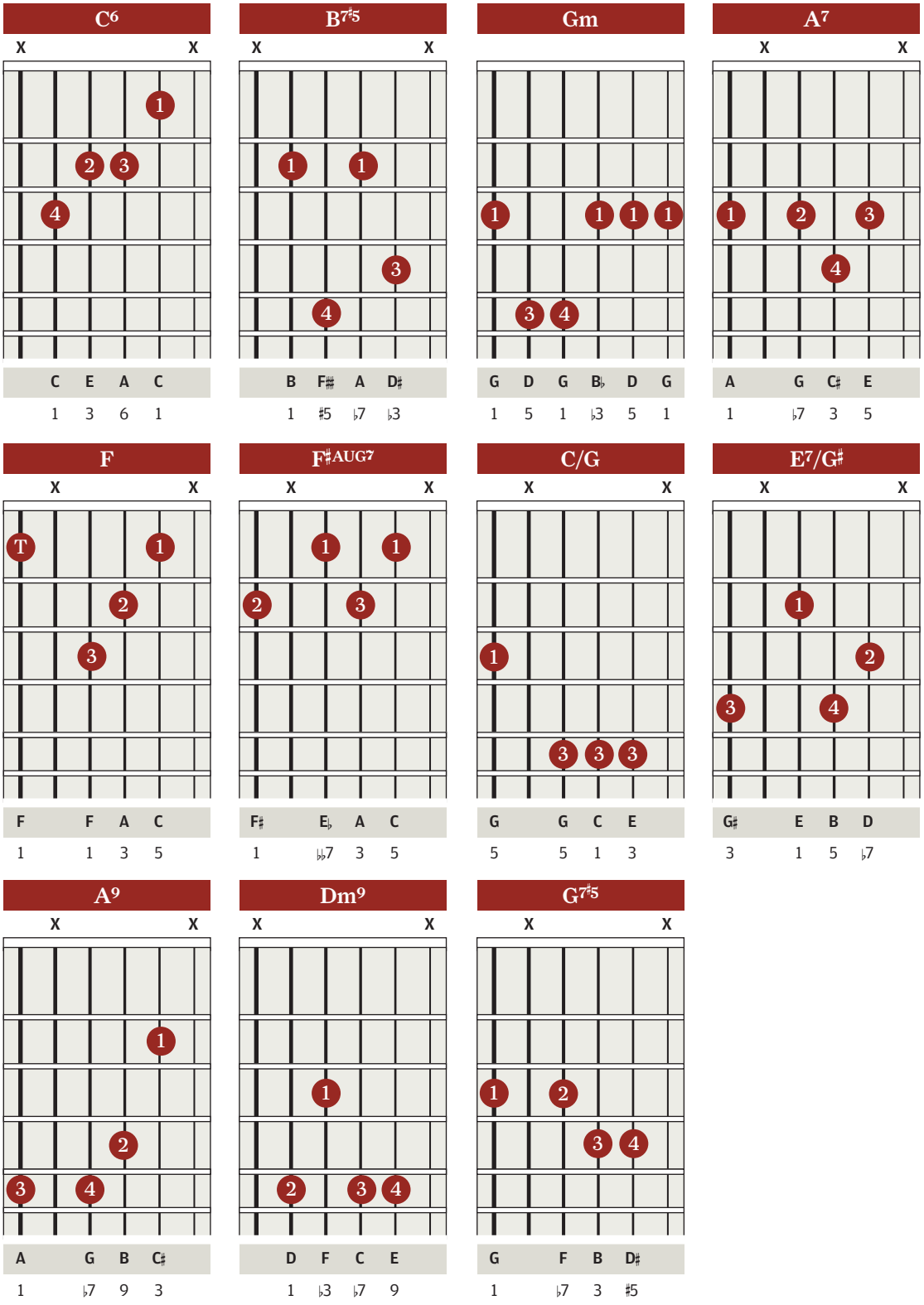


at here are ways for chord five (V) to move to chord one (I), which is the same as saying the dominant chord to move to the tonic chord. Seven sharp five chords fall into the category of altered or extended dominant chords and are sometimes notated using "aug" instead of ♯5. G7aug, for example.

The two chords in figure 3 take the root notes over to the D string to demonstrate F7♯5 moving to B♭ major. Now, pay attention at the back. Can you lower the sharp five in the F7♯5 chord to make an ordinary F7? How about dropping the top note of the B♭ chord down one fret to make B♭maj7? Well done, we like to try and keep you on your toes.

Figure 4 is an eight-bar chord sequence made up of 11 chords that include 7♯5, dim7, ninth and slash chords. Every chord gets one bar to itself except the F and F♯aug7, which come in bar four, two beats each, and the C/G, E7/G♯ and A9 which make up bar five with C/G and E7/G♯ on the first two beats. Computer game music composers roam wild

Figure 4



and free over the history of music and you are just as likely to hear something by Bach as something by Bonamassa playing in the background of a video game. Here we have a chord sequence inspired by one of the cute little tunes that pops out of a Mario game but it could also be by artists who take their cue from the jazz and blues songs of the 1920s such as Randy Newman or Tom Waits. Have a listen to Randy Newman's *You've Got A Friend In Me* to hear a 7♯5 chord in action – the second chord of the song is B♭7♯5.

Old Time Music

Play figure 4 in a steady four beats to the bar using a down stroke on every beat like an old-time jazzer. Hold the chord on the first and third beats but add a touch of staccato on beats two and four by releasing the fret hand fingers – don't let go of the strings, just stop pressing them down. That should get you playing in a vintage swing style. Tidy fingering is required and, as above, be sure to mute any notes that are not meant to be sounding. Enjoy working on this challenging but unusual chord sequence and I'll see you next month.

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WEM vintage valve combos: Clubman Mk8 £250, Dominator Mk2 1x12, £380. Transistor ER 40 head plus pair matching 2x12 speakers, £230. Cumbria, 07773 276815

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The Guitar Magazine

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Joe Satriani

The shred legend on underground reasearch stations, Avocado Sunbursts and seductively out of tune guitars...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"I fall in and out of love with guitars and amps constantly. Perhaps it's a physical thing... Maybe it's mystical! Don't you hate when guitarists talk like that? I do. The last few years has seen me closest to my Ibanez JS2410 MCO #1. It has a lower output, and that seems to inspire better phrasing, or maybe it's just my imagination!"

2 In another life I'd have been...
"I would not have sought out a profession in the public eye. Put me in an underground research lab, space station, arctic outpost... I'll never work out my love of performing and my shyness. They should work against each other, but they enhance my experience by making it so cathartic and meaningful. Why are guitarists so strange? That's the real question."

3 The moment it all started...
"I was eight or nine when I saw a covers band playing *Satisfaction*. That changed my life forever. My parents were dropping off my older sisters at a dance and let me stand at the door for a minute and watch the band play. I was mesmerized by the whole scene."

4 The one that got away...
"The ones that were stolen are still missed, especially my Donnie Hunt JS and one of my original JS Chrome guitars. I once owned a '54 hardtail Strat that had the most unusual green sunburst refinish. The guys at the shop called it 'Avocado Sunburst'. Very California. I recorded my first EP with it. I sold it to one of my students... I hope he's taking good care of it."

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"In the early 90s I played on Alice Cooper's *Hey Stoopid* album. The sessions went great, but at a guest appearance at the Shoreline Amphitheatre, things went screwy. I was announced, I walked out – in a leather jacket and cycling pants – plugged in and for 10 minutes, not one sound came out of the amp! I shrunk to the size of a small insect and crawled off stage after taking a humiliating bow with Alice and the band. Lesson learned: never wear cycling pants to a gig!"

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"'Never forget what they've done to you, but, never show them you remember'. I saw that on a poster called the '10 Rules of Show Business' in the men's room at the offices of my former manager Bill Graham in San Francisco. The others were good, too – such as 'Get the money', followed by, 'Don't forget to get the money'!"

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"I've been forcing myself to always tune up first. You'd be surprised how seductive an out-of-tune guitar is. It feels so cool to just pick it up and play whatever the fuck you want! But if you then stop for a moment and tune up, somehow, a little bit of the mojo goes away!"

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"A good bag of potato chips, salted, no extra flavouring. Whatever you do, do not mess with my chips."

9 My guilty pleasure...
"A few tours back I was overwhelmed with nostalgia for my ELP days. I still love those records. Come to think of it, I don't feel guilty about them at all."

10 If I could play one thing...
"I can play just about any Hendrix song, but when you get down to it, I can't play them right. Nobody can. Only Jimi could do Jimi right. It's impossible to decode his magic."

Joe Satriani's new album, *What Happens Next*, is out 12 January on Legacy Recordings/Sony Music

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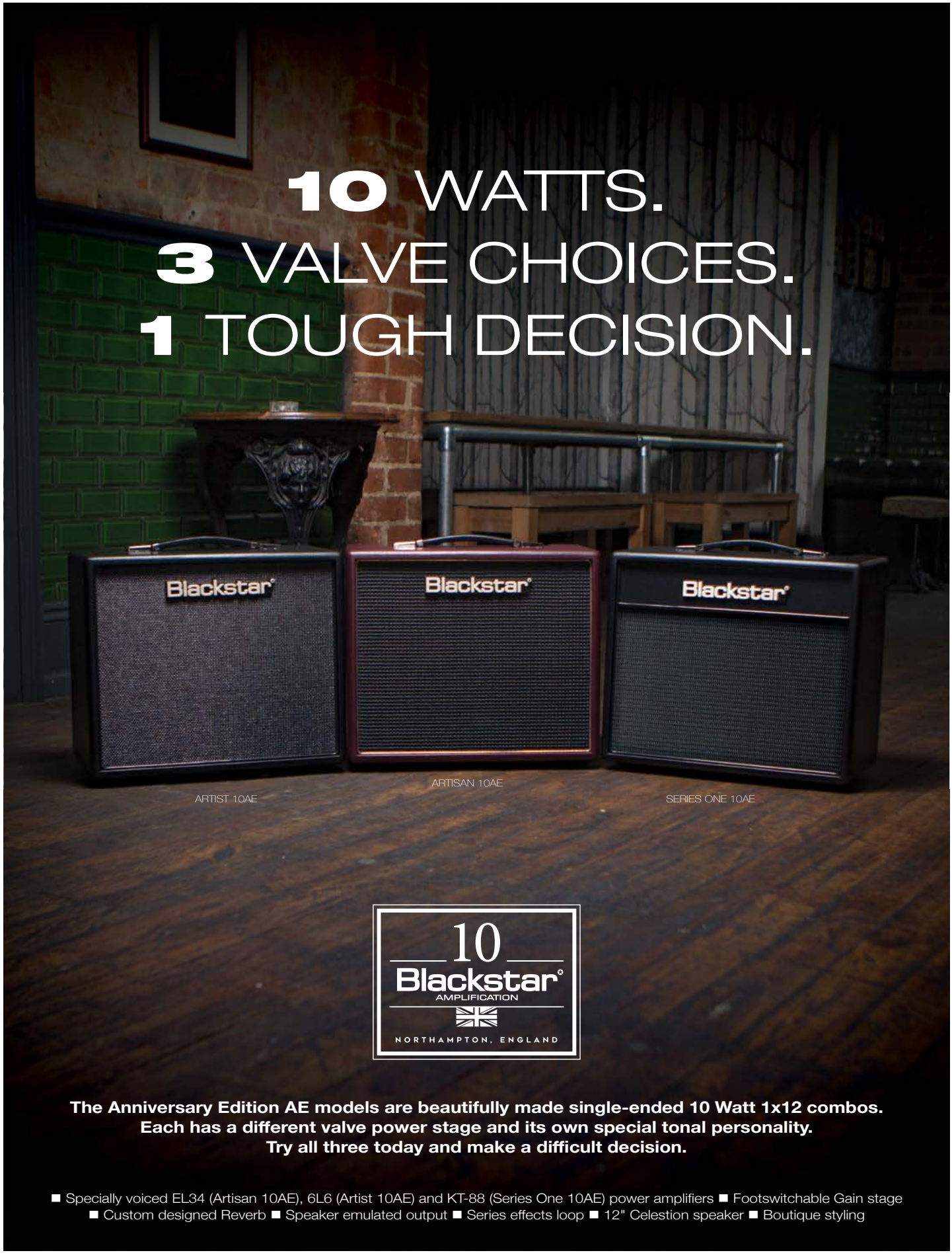

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